VERSES

Ralph A. Lewin

Introduction

Fifty years ago, poetry died. Well, that's not really right. What I mean is that, within the last few decades, the ranks of true poets have declined until we're now an endangered species. How did that come about? Probably because people who paid agents, took tea with editors, or drew salaries for teaching students, thought to themselves (or should have thought to themselves): "Why bother to compose poetry when I can just write quaint prose and induce a typesetter to set it in short lines?" (Want to see examples? Look in any recent issue of, say, The New Yorker.)

It's a pity, really, that English poetry declined. Real poetry's a kind of song, normally with a set rhythm and formal rhymes, for people who can't sing, play no musical instrument, and don't know how to read music or compose on five printed staves. But it's designed to be memorable, and maybe to evoke a tear, a frown or a smile. "Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow, and everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go." (Not particularly moving, I admit, but even a child can remember it *verbatim*.)

And English is such fun to use, a rich, unmatched vocabulary with plenty of potential redundancies (it's a German dialect overlain by French patronage) and lots of choices of stress (George, Mary, Anthony - da, da-di, da-di-di: love, wedding, divorce, misery, alimony - da, da-di, di-da, da-di-di, da-di-di-di). Centuries ago we had many good English poets (Pope, Dryden, Goldsmith ...), and more recently we had plenty of others (Gilbert, Chesterton, Milne, Morris, Bishop, Parker, McGinley, to name just a few) - but now? I'm in such a small company!

How can I be so arrogant? I'm not even in a department of literature! I'm a retired professor of marine biology, having authored hundreds of scientific articles and edited or written several books on algae, and even one on shit. But if you want to know how and why I go in for poetry, check among the following pages. What do you think?

Ralph Lewin
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Plants

Genomes ver 1031.ina

In a few respects, at least,
Humans, fruit-flies, worms and yeast,
Cattle, salmon, pigs and mice,
Corn, tomatoes, soy and rice,
On a broad phyletic tree,
Share a common ancestry

Tell me, where is fancy bred,
In the heart or in the head –
In our minds or in our genes
Or in GM soya beans?

* * *

Prochloron ver85q.whe

When algae all were bluish-green
And all prokaryotic,
The land (the non-aquatic scene)
Was mostly quite chaotic,

Prochloron cells' potential role,
Though relatively close, is
Not quite the ancestor we need
For algal symbiosis.

Algae on the wall ver 967.int

In this land of saints and crosses
Rivers, loughs and waterfalls
Where the lichens and the mosses
Vie with algae on the walls

Here, where traffic never touches;
Where a cycle rarely rubs,
Purple, green and olive smutches
Darken walls around the pubs.

In the by-ways dim and narrow,
Far from open moors and bogs,
Well below the realm of sparrow,
Level with the legs of dogs,

Irish drinkers – younger, older,
Sons of Erin, short or tall –
As the days grow darker, colder,
Feel the urge to wet a wall.

After drinking Coca-cola,
Lemonade or Grinness stout,
Watering the Prasi-ola.
(All that water must come out).

Moistened by urinal showers
Wetting walls and roadside trees,
Algae flourish after hours,
Fertilized by boozers' pees.

* * *

Toxic blooms, toxic blooms
Vie with smog and sonic booms.
Bigger, thicker, redder tides
Taint the seas with plankticides.
Toll the tocsins! Tides of doom!
Woe to us the bloody bloom!

Neurotoxicants attack
Herrings in the Skagerrak,
Decimating fishes that
Used to throng the Kattegat,
Dooming them to dismal fates:
Death by dinoflagellates.

* * *

Caveat Laminaria! ver738.bew

Beware the dreadful scoubidou
(If you're a Breton kelp),
For if by chance it catches you,
You can expect no help.

It pulls you from the solid rock
To which good kelps attach,
And dooms you to the harvest dock
In masses, batch by batch.

You can't avoid the scoubidou
Suspended from its crane;
A sickle welded to a screw
Applies both torque and strain.

It grabs you firmly by your stipe
(The usual position
For catching kelps of any type)
And pulls you to perdition.

You algae face a sorry fate:
Mankind is after you
To turn you into alginate
By use of scoubidou.

* * *

Phycology by fiat ver714.blu

The blue-greens are not algae any more ... any more.
It seems that they're not lost, but gone before.
By a stern decree despotic,
Since they're all prokaryotic,
The poor blue-greens can't be algae any more.

Euglena's not an alga any more ... any more,
Whatever people thought of it before.
Its form is somewhat plastic
And its pellicle's elastic,
So *Euglena*'s not an alga any more.

Spirogyra's not an alga any more ... any more,
Though it passes nuclei from pore to pore,
Since it hasn't swimming gametes
It's reclassified with *Trametes*.
Spirogyra's not an alga any more.

Red algae are not algae any more ... any more,
Though the reddest weeds abound on every shore.
Since their microsporulation
Is devoid of flagellation,
The red algae can't be algae any more.

You cannot regard an alga as a plant ... as a plant.
However much you want to, you just can't.
If it's not to late to switch
You should throw away your Fritsch,
For the algae are not algae anymore.

* * *

The wistful cryptogamist ver T13.oil

The oil of the botanist burns
Far into the night, as he learns
  About fertilization
  And leaves and venation
In liverworts, mosses and ferns.
(He'd hiked along heathery burns
(Too hot or too chilly by turns)
  And spent a few days
  By the lochs and the braes
Among liverworts, mosses and ferns.
Now sometimes he wistfully yearns
For field-trips long past, and returns
  (In dreamland illusions)
  To verdant profusions
Of liverworts, mosses and ferns.
In fret or in fancy he spurns
The money his scholarship earns,
  And vows to stay poor
  In a marsh or a moor
Among liverworts, mosses and ferns.

The blushing of Fungus X ver748.the

There lived a little fungus in the Lower Phycocene,
When lands were mostly mud-flats, but the seas were fresh and green.
He utilized the substrates, most molecularly mixed,
That other micro-organisms diligently fixed.

But soon it grew less easy to get food of any kind,
And free amino-acids were extremely hard to find.
He varied his cytology, his hyphae and his sex,
But life became precarious for little Fungus X.

His protoplasm languished to a catatonic state:
Extinction seemed to loom as his inevitable fate.–
Till, getting even hungrier, and pale and very thin,
He swallowed some prokaryotes with phycoerythrin.

Resisting lytic enzymes in the fungus's inside,
They integrated with his cells and somehow multiplied,
Transforming into plastids (as some scientists believe)
Which gave the cells of Fungus X an ultimate reprieve.

For, when the sun began to shine, despite those cloudy skies,
He learned to take up CO_2 and photosynthesize.
His metabolic processes were changed from A to Z:
"I've turned into a rhodophyte!" the red ex-fungus said.

He blushed a little as he spoke, and added with a grin
"I shouldn't be alive without that phycoerythrin."
This points to the conclusion: as the little fungus said,
Confronted with starvation, one is better red than dead.

* * *

Shaggy cap ver777.ins

In shady gap
  Along a hedge
A shaggy cap
  With snowy edge
And scrolling brim,
  Enacts, with age,
A paradigm.
  A later stage
Is darker pink,
  And, in a day,
It turns to ink
  And drips away.

Its solid state
  Dissolves in tears
And ultimately
  Disappears.
With tissues torn
  By Nature’s sneeze,
Its dust is borne
  Upon the breeze.

My shaggy hair
  With age must grey,
And what I wear
  Will fade and fray,
While what I think
  And then record
In sable ink
  May blow abroad.

So, more or less
  From here to there,
I spread my message
  Through the air.
The truths I teach
  With mental toil
Some day may reach
  More fertile soil
And where they stop
  Produce, perhaps,
A wiser crop
  Of shaggy caps.

ANGIOSPERMS

Pancratium ver 957.jus

Just above the tide-line
  In a narrow band
Underneath the grasses
  Just below the sand
There are crinum lilies
  That remain alive:
In the heat of summer.
  Somehow they survive.

Early in the autumn
  Under sunny skies
Cretan crinum lilies
  Cautiously arise
Up from under grasses,
  Pushing through the mud,
Cretan crinum lilies
  Blossom under God.

Six exquisite petals
  And a snowy skirt,
Cretan crinum lilies
  Rise above the dirt –
Rise above the grasses,
  Rise above the sod,
Cretan crinum lilies
  Bow their blooms to God.

* * *

Poppies ver 692.inf

In Flanders' fields, the scarlet poppies bloom
Where once, in mud and dust,
The khaki flower of youth – white men and boys –
Died so that, after them, we should be free,
To be remembered by families
And friends and all on Poppy Days.

Now, half a world away
Among sub-tropic hills,
Small brown and yellow folk
Grow other kinds of poppies, mauve and white,
And, from their harvest, earn enough
To buy blue jeans and white rice –

While, half another world away,
Black and white youths
Consume the snowy dust
That dooms them to a slavery.

But, when they pine and die,
Reviled by many, loved by yet a few,
Their poisoned blood
Is not remembered by red poppies.

* * *

The Peaches of Chromesia ver 801.hai

Hail fair Chromesia, from whose twisted trees
Hang velvet fruits of candour unsurpassed –
Pale amber, blushing global entities.

Like one Alberta, of a duskier cast –
Her countenance demure, her cheeks bedewed
With humours of cool, early morning mist –
A slim Hellenic maiden, ebon-queued
(The sable satin shines where sunshine kissed.)

Old, gnarled, deep-embedded orchard roots
Support each sturdy trunk and lissome limb
That bears sweet succulence of tender fruits
Conceived on branches that have known no trim.

Chromesia fills her basket, loosely tied,
With peaches early-plucked at orchard-side.

* * *

Citrous musings ver815.the

There was a man of Guayaquil
Who liked to nibble lemon-peel.
He took the stuff at every meal –
He said it kept him fitter.

His friend, who came from Paraguay,
Preferred the taste of lemon-pie.
Unsweetened pie he wouldn't try –
He found it much too bitter.

Their friend, from Lima (in Peru)
Said "Do as other people do:
If other people do it too,
You shouldn't be a quitter.

Eat lemons like the Lima-ese,
With mashed potatoes, pork and peas.
Whatever grows on lemon trees
Has got a golden glitter."

Don't temporize with Bolivar:
You are what you believe you are;
So hitch your wagon to a star
And bear in mind our mission:

We help the native Guayanese
To grow more fruitful orange trees,
And save their souls, by slow degrees,
From ultimate perdition.

* * *

The Garden Party ver765.pom

The pomegranate tree speaks:

"My seeds are like nipples, my fruit like a breast:
My trunk the most sturdy, my branches the best.
Wherever a flower has blossomed and died,
Another breaks through from a twig on the side.
My evergreen leaves neither shrivel nor fade,
And youths with fair maidens disport in my shade
Perfumed with sweet resin, light-headed with wine
Of grapes from the hills – but the syrup is mine."

The country youths speak:

"Light dappling filters through branches above.
The wine stirs our spirits, so let us make love,
And in the reed hut of a watchman nearby,
Come, let us disport, unobserved by the sky."

"I'd rather remain where the sky can be seen,
Out here, where the branches are shady and green."

Chorus:

The sunlight is strong, but their spirits are stronger.
They stay, making love, for a little while longer.

The tree disapproves of their conjugal bliss.
"I'll teach them a lesson" she grumbles "for this.
The youths of today are too bold and too free:
They show no respect for an elderly tree."

The fig tree speaks:

"My trunk may be bent, but my branches are shady.
I'd gladly comply with the will of my lady.
She brought me from Kharu, and planted me here
Where the verges are dry and the countryside sere.
But though she may drink to her heartfelt desire,
She fails to supply all the drink I require.
Like your need for liquor, consider, too, mine:
Please water my roots as you relish your wine."

The sycamore fig speaks:

"You planted me, too, with your own gentle hand.
My voice is the sweetest that's heard in the land.
My leaves are green-glaucous, my figs purple-brown;
Now, under my branches, in whispering shade,
A murmur is heard from the amorous maid."

The gardener's daughter is taking her ease,
Concealed in the shade, the fig-sycamore tree's.
"Come heed, my beloved, the surge of the blood,
And let us make love while our youth's at the flood.
The cool of the night at the end of the day
Encourages us to such passionate play."

The noble farm-host speaks:

"The grasses are soft, and the canopy's dark.
My servants rejoice as we drink in my park,
While yours, bearing flagons of beer and new wine,
Are boisterous, even more drunken than mine.
You came bearing loaves, with sweet herbs and gay flowers,
And succulent fruits, even sweeter than ours.
Now join in our revels, good neighbours, and stay
To rest in our court at the close of the day."

The trees speak again:

"The guests have become drunken, and stagger about.
The party goes on till the liquor runs out,
While, deep in the arbour, where long they have lain,
Half-sober, half-clad, the young lovers remain.
But we, the tree spirits, will never disclose
What we have been witnessing under the rose."

* * *

Amazing grapes ver944.ama

Amazing grapes, how sweetly grown
In vineyards – mile on mile –
Along the valley of the Rhone
And on the banks of Rhine.

Amazing grapes are double blessed
In galleries discreet,
And trodden on, and gently pressed
By holy virgins' feet.

Amazing grapes, by warmth of sun
And miracle divine,
In vats fermented, ton on ton,
Transmute into a wine.

* * *

The holly and the ivy ver813.hol

The holly and the ivy
That in the woods do grow
Are evergreens of winter scenes,
As is the mistletoe.

The holly bears its berries
That ripen into red.
Its crown of leaves, of shining green,
Are spiny, quick or dead.

The autumn ivy berries
Turn purple when they freeze.
It has a few roots to bear its shoots,
But strangles other trees.

Whereas the magic mistletoe
Has not a root at all.
It sucks the sap from sturdy oaks
And noble ashes tall.

Its bitter berries ripen white
As newly driven snow.
(In winter-time we make bird-lime
From fruits of mistletoe.)

Each bush is noxious in its way
As any plants that grow:
The holly and the ivy
And the bitter mistletoe.

* * *

Beware of Hellenes bearing gifts,
And Prussians wearing boots,
And acrid fumes, and smoke-filled rooms,
And toxic woodland fruits.

* * *

Ode to a stricken plum tree ver739.bef

Before our residence was planned,
This was your own, your native land.
Oblivious to life's alarms,
You held up six or seven arms
And saw the seasons, in and out,
Through winter's frost and summer's drought.

We told the men who cleared the land
"That dignified old tree must stand."
We told the chap who dug the drain
"That aged plum tree must remain."

With rugged trunk and gnarled root,
You gave us shade and, sometimes, fruit.
We little know, beneath your shade,
How much your branches had decayed.
Until strong winds, combined with rain,
Tore almost half your crown in twain.

Thus do misfortunes sometimes come
To man and beast – and even plum.

* * *

Elms ver734.sta

The stately elms of England
Have vanished from the scene.
Now canopies of other trees
Are keeping England green.
The fungus and the beetle grub
That laid the monarch low
Have cleared a place on Nature's face
For other trees to grow.

The stately elms of England
May not be seen again.
Low, stunted bolls with squirrel holes
Are all that now remain.
Broad sycamores and poplar trees
And oaks and ashes stand
In leafy glades, to cast their shades
Upon the summer land.

The elms have gone from England,
But still, in sketch and paint,
The trees, long gone, in art live on,
Though yellowing and faint.
Their trunks were crowned with gold and green,
For they were regal trees.
The elms of yore, though here no more,
Live on in memories.

* * *

INVERTEBRATES

Injustice ver837.one

One mutant jellyfish – a thing
I've never seen before –
Has six great gonads in a ring,
Instead of merely four.
To be thus multiply endowed
Is really quite unfair
While I am only just allowed
To have a single pair.

* * *

The cockles and the mussels
Were indubitably dumb.
(Their shellfish genes had programmed them
To shut up and keep mum.)
No noise annoyed the oysters
Who had stayed in bed at ease,
And nothing stirred the waters
In the silence of the seas.

The quahogs all clammed up, embedded
In the muddy bay,
Down past their points of entry,
Where they pass the time of day.
The razor-shells slid down in time
(Though by a narrow shave),
Declining any comment
With a noncommittal wave.

There were no Mumbles heard, no Creek,
No soft Long-Island Sound,
And only silent ripples bore
The rumours going round.
It wasn't that they're selfish –
None have softer hearts than they –
But the poor amnesic shellfish
Had forgotten what to say.

* * *

Mole Cricket, Anyone? ver654.heo

He only flies
At wides or byes:
He shuns the wily bat.
He lives in holes
Where Nature bowls,
And stridulates like zzzat.

To rest in peace
Behind a crease
He may perhaps retire:
Then, over tea
And crumpets, he
May join us by the fire.

* * *

Total Consummation ver747.pra

The praying mantis operates with simulated piety:
It solemnly embraces the poor prey for which it prays.
(Though striving for acceptance in respectable society,
It merits no approval for its irreligious ways.)

The lady mantis rubs her hands, encountering a mate.
Her appetite is whetted when the nuptial bond is sealed.
Her simple spouse, oblivious of unrelenting fate,
Is so engaged in mating that he rarely fails to yield.

When Mrs. M. initiates pre-consummation play,
Her consort seems quite unaware of how it all will end.
She nibbles him behind his ear, then chews his head away
And bit by bit, incorporates her newly-wedded friend.

The luckless bridegroom, passive in his amorous temerity,
Supplies the wedding breakfast with his body and his brains.
Substantiated into eggs, providing for posterity,
He's finally consumed in love, and little else remains.

So, Mr. Mantis, do not seek a sweet, submissive wife.
Stay celibate, for when you hear the wedding bells some day,
Don't ask for whom they're tolling, if you value your sweet life:
It is for you the tocsins sound, for you the ladies pray.

* * *

Water bugs ver824.wat

The water bugs, with skinny arms
And negligible necks,
Include, among their vital charms,
An interest in sex.

The water bugs, that dive and swim
Or specialize in skating,
May differ in both life and limb
And also, mode of mating.

So many bugs that we discuss,
From shallow ponds or deep, ‘ll
Behave in subtle ways like us –
Like ordinary people.

* * *

The fish-faced fly ver819.alo

Along the beaches there's a band
Of sandy mud and muddy sand
Whereon, among the tangled weed,
The fish-faced flies are wont to feed.

When they feel ready for dessert
They do a dance upon the dirt
And thereby loosen little crumbs
Of algal cells and diatoms.

Their shuffling somehow liberates
Debris and micro-flagellates.

And that, my dears, accounts for why
The hoary little fish-faced fly
Has, hobbit-like, such hairy feet:
He dances, so that he can eat.

* * *

Hanging gardens ver625.inb

In Beds. and Salop., Herts. and Hants.,
Our garden plots abound with ants
Though, in the sod where Adam delves,
They make no gardens for themselves.

But, on an antithetic topic,
In humid forests neo-tropic
Live other garden-loving ants
(Benign insects or miscreants)
That build, with rooted herb and carton,
A kind of formic kindergarten,
Secure from antisocial tykes
(Ant-eaters, pangolins and shrikes),
And thus exhibit care towards
Their pupae and their honey-hoards
In hanging gardens, modeled on
Old prototypes in Babylon.

* * *

Upon a mushroom in a field, a caterpillar sat.
"One side makes you thin" he said. "The other makes you fat.
Break off a little bit, and put it in your mouth:
Fatter on the north side, thinner on the south."

(East side, west side – fatter or thinner –
But watch what you fry with your steak for dinner.
With little white spots on a bright red skin,
Eating Amanitas can do you in.)

At the theatre intervals come ushers in the aisles –
Trays a-brim with packages, and wreathed in smiles.
Cigarettes and chocolates, with genial chatter:
One makes you thinner and the other makes you fatter.

* * *

‘Neath a cloudless summer sky,
Kitty managed once to catch
An attractive butterfly
Flitting through her cabbage patch.

Loving pretty little things,
Kitty caught the insect, and
Gently pinioning its wings,
Held it firmly in her hand.

“Help!” the little creature cried;
“I’m a child of God, like you.
Don’t commit insecticide!
Set me free, I beg of you!”

Kindly Kitty thought again:
“It’s a child of God, like me.
Though it struggles now in vain,
I shall set the creature free.”

Gratefully it flew away.
Laid its eggs in Kitty’s plot,
And its offspring, sad to say,
Ultimately ate the lot.

* * *

Long years ago, when all the World was green –
Few birds or blooms lent colour to the scene –
A drop of sticky, resinaceous sap
On some old Araucaria chanced to trap
A weevil that had overstepped its zeal
In gleaning pollen for its midday meal.
The insect struggled, but the gum held fast
Until that hapless creature breathed its last,
Immersed in resin exudate, which served
To catch and keep it, dead but yet preserved.

Millennia passed since that poor weevil died.
It stayed, forever amber, mummified
Until some Lebanese went out to fill
His satchel, on a yellow-pebbled hill,
With bits of amber, later to be sold
To foreign entomologists for gold.

Through time and space, that fossil travelled far
Until, by sleight of hand, and PCR,
The insect – or its vital DNA –
Emerged once more into the light of day.
The scientists compared it with a batch
Of other insects, seeking closest match.
Their sequence data, correlated thus,
Revealed it to be coleopterous,
And showed that tiny specimen to be
Related to Curculionidae.

It plainly was what scientists could call
A true, primaeval weevil after all.

Embalmed in amber, fossilized pro tem.,
The weevil that men do lives after them.

* * *

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

Down in the forest, something stirred –
Something feathered, or scaled, or furred,
Under the bushes of Monteverd'

Something rustled across the ground –
Something making its own soft sound,
Down where the deeper shades are found.

Reptile or insect, beast or bird,
Down in the forest, something stirred
Down in the forest of Monteverd'.

* * *

Over the line where the trees came down
Flowers wilted, and leaves turned brown;

* * *

Sometimes a lizard can still be seen
Down by a stream where the leaves are green.
Sometimes a whistle can still be heard,
Down by the forest of Monteverd'.
But nothing rustles across the road –
Only the ghost of a golden toad.

* * *

There are embayments in the mud
Along the upper Nile
Where one may find, before each flood,
A nesting crocodile.

Secluded in a patch of sand
Where reeds grow green and rank,
She keeps a vigil close at hand
Beside the river bank.

She guards her eggs with loving care
In that selected patch,
And listens for soft chirrups where
Her young are due to hatch.

Sometimes, in more successful years
A mother crocodile
May dry her customary tears
And maybe even smile.

* * *

The Little Turtle ver716.atu

A turtle in a metal bowl
  Looks out with sad and scaly eyes.
She should be mistress of her soul,
  But Fate has ordered otherwise.

Beside her, in a murky tank
  Swim seven eels of shining jet
And one lethargic carp, that sank
  And so escaped the kitchen net.

The turtle still recalls her nest,
  Concealed among the muddy reeds
Beside a pond, where bullfrogs rest
  On lily pads or water weeds.

But now a fluorescent lamp
  Is all that lights her lacquer sky.
The floor around her bowl is damp:
  A scoop and bucket stand nearby.

Some little children come to kneel
  And watch her, from the room beyond.
They cannot know how turtles feel,
  Imprisoned in a shallow pond.

Now listless, she can only wait,
  Without a hope, without a friend,
Until unsympathetic fate
  Establishes her grisly end.

A diner, on a passing whim,
  Decides upon her for a meal.
The cook dismembers limb from limb,
  For no-one knows how turtles feel.

* * *

The problem of the blue-tailed skink
Is not as simple as you'd think.
  We see them at the local zoo:
  Their tails have varied shades of blue.
According to Professor Case,
There isn't just a single race:
  On islands that they reached of late,
  These lizards tend to speciate,
The species of the blue-tailed skink
Are not as skinkle as you'd think.

* * *

BIRDS

Alaudulae pratenses (II) ver675.aga

A garden is a lovesome thing,
But who has time for gardening?
So, with the weather-man, we share
The tasks of watering and care.

He caters to its basic needs,
While we attempt to curb the weeds.
We call it, with all due respect,
Our Garden of Benign Neglect.

* * *

Alaudulae pratenses (I) ver67.aco

A country garden is a lovesome thing,
But we have little time for gardening
  And so, with Nature's benison, we share
  The watering and basic garden care.
We call it, without conscious disrespect,
Our Humble Garden of Benign Neglect.

* * *

The mullah and the robin ver491.sun

The sun has not arisen yet.
E'er dawn, he climbs a narrow stair
And, from his lofty minaret,
He calls the Muslim world to prayer.

And men in hamlet, house or hall
Observe the breaking of the day
And pious ones, who hear the call,
Go down upon their knees to pray

While, more exposed to mortal view,
A bold cock-robin on a tree,
Still damp with early morning dew,
Declaims his macho melody.

O'er gardens, copses, woods or fens,
He sings a challenge through the day
To warn his small harem of hens
That other cocks must stay away.

The mullah and the robin call,
But neither sings for simple art.
The robin, from his pulpit tall,
Reflects his Sunni counterpart.

* * *

So send your message through the air,
Announce your presence loud and long,
As strident as a mullah's prayer
And subtle as a robin's song.

* * *

The abacus and the swallows ver838.bla

Black swallows sit, like rows of beads
  Along a slender rail:
An abacus, to calculate
  When calculators fail,

Assembled, crowded at one end
  Or perched in 2's and 3's,
Informed by wireless telegraph
  To head across the seas.

On orienting abacus,
  By some subconscious ways
In 2's and 3's, or powers of ten,
  They count the season's days.

They plan with dates and mental charts,
  Contriving by some means
To use the calendars and maps
  Encoded in their genes.

They sense unseen magnetic lines
  Extending pole to pole,
And use some subtle seventh sense
  To reach their distant goal.

They take trans-continental routes
  They've never flown before
To spend a second summer-time
  On Africa's distant shore.

They feed and breed, and raise their young,
  By life's allotted roles,
Like beads on wires of abacus
  That stretch between the poles.

* * *

The Pensive Penguin ver682.pen

The penguin looked down at the egg on his feet –
  He guarded their egg by himself –
And hoped that his mate would bring something to eat
  From the fisheries out on the shelf.

The penguin looked up through the hole in the sky
  To a dome of celestial blue.
It set him to thinking, and wondering why
  One does what one's destined to do.

He looked down his shirt to the egg on his toes
  And gave it a fatherly prod
To turn in around from the gales and the snows
  Ordained by an avian god;

While, out in the heavens, that avian god
  Looked down through the hole in the sky
At millions of haddock and herring and cod,
  And zillions of fish-eggs and fry.

He peered through the hole at the Lands of the Blest,
  Surrounded by oceans of whales,
And saw all the penguins impeccably dressed:
  Black tie, with white waistcoat and tails.

They shuffled around like the man in the street,
  Exchanging some grass or a nod,
And the god, looking down at the World at his feet,
  Bestowed an affectionate prod.

* * *

The Coo de Grace ver674.pig

A pigeon flew into the Headington Church
For shelter, salvation or seeds,
Or maybe he sought, from an avian perch,
To learn about Christian creeds.

His wasn't a soul one would need to admit.
He'd paid no parochial dues,
Though one could observe that he'd done his small bit
To plaster a few of the pews.

The voice of the turtle was heard in the aisle.
He fluttered forlornly about
From lintel to altar, from pillar to pile,
In frantic attempts to get out.

His efforts grew weaker; he cooed and he coughed,
Despairing perhaps of his plight,
Then flew to the organ that stands on the loft,
And slept for the rest of the night.

Next morning he managed to squeeze in a hole,
Dejected, and mortally tired.
He ruffled his feather, resigning his soul;
Then cooed his last coo, and expired.

*****

The organist came in on Saturday night
To practise a few of her chords;
But somehow the harmonies didn't sound right
For choristers' praise, or the Lord's.

She wondered if something was blocking the way,
Suspecting what might have occurred,
And noted, obstructing the end of low A,
The corpse of that pitiful bird.

The pipe of the organ at length was unblocked
With muttered, unprintable words –
And now the church door will be closed, if not locked,
To keep out impenitent birds.

Conclusions and morals of various types
Emerge from this sorry demise.
Wild pigeons should not be admitted to pipes;
They're very much better in pies.

The bird is forgotten, as memories dim
  (As memories normally do),
But sometimes you'll hear, at the end of a hymn,
  The ghost of an ultimate coo.

* * *

A poet sat beside a stream
And pondered hard and long
Of poems still perchance to dream
Or songs as yet unsung.

A pheasant flew behind a hedge
She could not leave it long
It held a clutch of little poults -
A brood of new-hatched young.

The speckled chicklets followed her
To seek half-hidden seeds
Among the meadow grass and moss
And softly swaying reeds.

And in that simple little scene,
There lay, it seemed to me,
An image of parental care
And nature's poetry..

* * *

On considering a Philippine breakfast ver 710.the

These tender things
With baby wings,
Prepackaged and forlorn,
Are doomed to be
Unfeelingly
Consumed before they're born.

Bald head appressed
Upon each breast;
Wide-eyed, demure and sad;
This morning's batch
Will never hatch,
No more can it go bad.

Whereas mankind
Is still inclined
To sin and mortal toil.
Too long, too late,
We face our fate
(Baluts have but to boil.)

* * *

The shore at night's end ver 971.ist

I stood on a rock by the salty sea
At the dawn of a leaden day,
And seven loons came gravely gliding
Out of the misty grey.

Their necks rose nobly over the swell,
And their calls were low and sweet,
And seven ripples arose and fell
With a lapping around my feet.

* * *

My mind is for the birds ver770.mym

My mind is like an ostrich, with its conscience in the sand.
It doesn't see what is to be, or what is close at hand;
And when its life has run its course, no more to love or lust,
Its feathers can be utilized for dissipating dust.

My mind is like a peacock, with a thousand azure eyes.
(They never seem to blink, I think, but just express surprise.)
But when my time is ended, and these pretty feathers fall,
They cannot serve as pillow-down, for they're no use at all.

My mind is like a swallow, rusty breast and dusky back.
It wanders wide across the World, to Africa and back.
With all its muddy nesting done, when all its chicks are flown,
It flies away to some far land without a telephone.

My mind is like a chicken - more precisely, like a hen.
It doesn't herald mornings (though it probably knows when).
It's in some pecking order in its covey, roost or group,
And having laid its final egg, it ends up in the soup.

My mind is like a sparrow. It can perch on twigs and wires.
It manages to live on crumbs, or barley in the shires.
But when the final oat is sown, with neither grub nor gnat,
It pines and dies. At its demise, it's eaten by a cat.

My mind is like a silver swan upon a glassy lake -
Like snow upon a mountain-top, or icing on a cake.
Where all is blank, beside the bank whereon my harp is hung,
On ultimate reflection, then my final song is sung.

My mind is like a goose (although, to speak with perfect candor,
A goose is of the tender gender: I'm a randy gander).
When plucked and cooked, and laid to rest upon a bed of peas,
They'll say the end was sudden, though it got there by degrees.

My mind is like a turkey. You may stuff it how you will
With rosemary and breadcrumbs, peppers, arrowroot and dill;
But when the dinner's over - when my time has come to die –
Just gather up whatever's left, and use it in a pie.

* * *

MAMMALS

The opossum ver806.her

Her looks appear nervous and puzzled
(Who knows what goes on in her mind?)
Her profile is narrowly muzzled,
With many more teeth than mankind.

This feature - essentially dental –
Distinguishes ‘possum from man.
It shows that she’s not a placental,
But of the marsupial clan.

Her tail is extremely prehensile:
It curls with remarkable grace.
Its tip is as slim as a pencil;
The rest broadens out at the base.

Her eyes are small, beady and crossable.
(Who knows what perspective she sees?)
To catch her is almost ompossuble
So long as she stays in the trees;

But when on the ground, she’s less agile:
Her gait is a sort of a slouch.
Her babies are tiny and fragile,
And spend many weeks in her pouch.

A ‘possum, in pink of condition,
Is proud of the fur of her coat.
(She may lean towards oppossition -
But no-one knows how she will vote.)

* * *

Around the early Eocene, when all the World was young and green, there leaped into the Austral scene the Giant Kangaroo:

A veritable Saltor Rex, equipped as well befits his sex. He safely cleared the Spinifex, a trooper tried and true.

What pouch could hold such wealth of grace? He bred, to dominate his race, and early took the pride of place across the Great Divide,

With sturdy tail and massive thighs, receptive ears and gleaming eyes, he carried his enormous size with dignity and pride.

His elegant prehensile hands were rarely soiled by desert sands. He matched the desiccated lands in shades of brown and grey;

But, as he loped across the plains in summer droughts or winter rains, his losses overran his gains; his kindred passed away,

And now, in the Antipodes, among the Eucalyptus trees are only little wallabies to represent his clan,

While, year by year, the landscape fills with flocks of sheep on rolling hills, and towns with dark, Satanic mills of interloper Man.

* * *

There once was a camel who lived round here
  Where there isn't so much to do.
He wanted a mate, so he tried to find
  A suitable mate of the camely kind
But he couldn't find any, so, faute de mieux,
He mated a kangaroo.

Although you may think this can't be believed,
That female 'garoo in fact conceived
And in due good season the beast gave birth
To a camelaroo - the first on earth.
It was manifestly and plainly male,
With knobbly knees and a big, stout tail,
A pouch in front and a hump behind.
It wasn't a beast you'd expect to find
In any of our Australian zoos –
The first of a line of camelaroos.

It fed on grass, and it grew and grew,
But - solitary as a camelaroo -
It turned out to be his unfortunate fate
Of never to find a compatible mate.
So he leaped and he galloped away, away,
And nothing's been seen of him since that day.

But some dark nights, when the moon is new,
You may hear him calling "garoo, garoo" –
And that will confirm that my tale is true
Of the only and loneliest camelaroo.

* * *

Armadillo ver839.tho

Though normally contracted, and concealed within his belly,
The common armadillo packs a many-banded rod
(A subject of significance to Dr D.A. Kelly*,
Though others may consider such a topic somewhat odd.)

He doesn't spend a lot of time in desultory dating,
Or waste a lot of energy a-billing and a-cooing,
But quickly mounts his mate and gets his willy up for mating,
Achieving consummation with some penetrative screwing.

Without oblique diagonals of muscular helicity,
The many-banded willy of the armadillo male
Is very well designed to serve in conjugal felicity
For, when it's fully turgid, it is longer than his tail.

* * *

There was a solitary sloth
  In forests far from here,
But he was loth to plight his troth
  As year succeeded year
Until another sloth (named Ruth)
  Remarked to him “I fear
We’re getting longer in the tooth,
  As time goes slowly by.
No longer in the bloom of youth,
  We ought to do, or die;
For zero population growth
  May spell a dismal end
To this, our noble race of sloth,
Unless we, male and female both,
  Can counteract the trend.”
Well finally, with measured sloth,
  They paired with slothful ease,
And, in due course, there was anoth-
  er sloth among the trees.

* * *

Squirrels ver835.squ

The squirrels are stealing our walnuts
  That grow by the side of our hut.
    They gnaw off the rind
    And consume what they find
  In the succulent middle - the nut.

The squirrels have raided our robins.
  They took all the eggs from their nest,
    And all that remains
    Now to show for their pains
  Are the shells: squirrels ate all the rest.

The squirrels wreak havoc in woodlands:
  They nibble the buds off the trees,
    And what branches still grow
    Are exceedingly slow
  And are subject to drought and disease.

The squirrels have eaten our roses
  As soon as the petals unfurled.
    They chewed them away -

    And I'm dreading the day
  When the squirrels take over the World.

* * *

Underground ver733.the

Their under-carriage thoroughfare,
With homes among the drains,
The city mice of Leicester Square
Survive among the trains.

They settle here, one may suppose,
To find a province free
From diverse upper-worldly foes
At Bank or Battersea.

No cats imperil their domains,
Nor baited traps with cheese.
Avoiding only passing trains,
They travel where they please.

Be outside weather foul or fair,
Spring gale or summer breeze,
The railway mice live unaware
Of surface vagaries.
Perceiving neither sun nor moon
Nor snow nor autumn rains,
They mark their midnight from their noon
By frequencies of trains.

When all the passengers have gone,
They nibble lunch or dine
On human manna, falling on
The Piccadilly Line.

They breakfast on discarded crumbs
That careless people strew
Along with chips and chewing-gums
We had no time to chew.

Though roaring monsters come and go -
Electrified, alive –
A single sleeper-width below,
The subway mice survive..
***

In Memoriam ver705.for

For “quaker”, pray, and for “moth-eaten”, mourn.
This threnody recalls their fate forlorn.

We catered to their reproductive need.
We cherished and encouraged them to breed.
  We nurtured them (for 15 cents a day)
  Until, on orders, they were shipped away:
Their natures chromosomonally imbued
With genes for “non-immunity” or “nude”,
  From whites to pure C-57 blacks:
  A thousand thousand cultivated JAX.

In two score years and two, that realm of mice,
Felled once by fire, has now been stricken twice,
  Ignited by explosion of propane
  To holocaust in far Bar Harbor, Maine.
Where, cage on cage, in box on burning box,
There perished scores of rare foundation stocks.
  On shelf and bench, in closely serried racks,
  There died a pyre of martyred murine JAX.

Weep, then, for mice in Roscoe Jackson’s name,
Incinerated in a burst of flame.
  Like fair Brunhild’, by fiery circle girt,
  They died, the nobles breeds of Mount Desert;
Their bodies ashed, their genes distilled away.
Mourn for “moth-eaten”, and for “”Quaker” pray!

* * *

Horses and nurses ver705.for

At some equestrian event
From Ghent to Aix (or Aix to Ghent)
  Or some ill-feted Darby Day
  One Ogden Nash was heard to say
“I know two things about a horse,
And one of them is rather coarse.”
* * *

I know three things about a nurse,
And two of them are even worse.

***

This morning, by a flower-bed,
  A llady-llama kissed me.
She kissed me llightly on the Hips!
So close she held her muzzle-tips
  That, had she spat on me instead,
  She hardly could have missed me.
From South America (deep south)
  One llives here, strange to tell,
And kisses people on the mouth
  To find out how we smell.

Here in Lla Jolla, it is rare
  To see such things as llamas,
And people tend to stand and stare.

If you should join a llamasery,
You may perhaps be asked to wear
  Lloose yellow silk pyjamas.

***

The Happy Warthog ver685.myh

My hooves are unsuited for carving.
  My flesh isn't pleasant to eat.
You'd have to be practically starving
  To take warthog fillets for meat.

The taste of my cutlets is rotten.
  The taste of my liver is worse.
My pelt is less cosy than cotton:
  One can't use my ear for a purse.

My hide is both wrinkled and spotted.
  No ivory hallows my tusks.
My body secretions, if potted,
  Rank far below civets and nusks,

My odour is rancid and musty.
  My knees are abraded and worn.
My muzzle is warty and crusty.
  I sport neither antler nor horn.

But I'm not inclined to be sorry,
  For recent statistics have shown
That hunters seek nobler quarry,
  And tend to leave warthogs alone.

Our range is mosquito-infested.
  Our homeland's unpleasantly hot.
So warthogs are rarely molested,
  And even less frequently shot.

* * *

Millie ver729.poo

Poor old doggie - presidential Millie -
  Heart-beat erratic, getting somewhat lame;
Daily growing slower and a trifle silly ;
  The White House water seems to be to blame.

Too much lithium and iodine and zinc;
  Too much cadmium and too much lead.
Pour it on the bushes, or pour it down the sink,
  And cook up the broccoli in beer instead.

Poor old doggy, antiquated Millie;
  Once she was the queen of presidential hounds.
Pity the daffodil, and rose, and lily,
  And poor old bushes in the White House grounds.

* * *

Nocturnal in habits, none rivals the fox.
He is shrewd, surreptitious and sly.
He peers from a gap among nettles and docks
With an ominous gleam in his eye.

The vixen, who raises her cubs in a den,
Conceals its position with care.
She's wary of strangers, especially men
Approaching her family lair.

So if you catch sight of a hurrying shade
As it slips among bushes and rocks,
Or skulks in a thicket, or hides in a glade,
It may be your neighbourhood fox.

* * *

The reversible part of Crocuta ver833.spo

The spotted hyaena's an odd sort of creature:
  The female resembles the male
Because of a pendulous, penis-like feature
  That hangs around under her tail.

She pulls it from outside to in when they pair
  (It ought to be obvious why).

(Young virgin unspotted hyaenas are rare
  And, quite understandably, shy.)

Then, when she's no longer engaged in coition,
  By pushing the thing inside-out,
She wangles it back to the hanging position -
  And once more her sex seems in doubt.

* * *

The animals had gathered from the jungle and the plain,
Assembled in a shady cave to shelter from the rain.

When Tarzan came to joint them, they all laughed because, they said,
“We wear out tails behind us: yours is up in front instead.”

But Tarzan said “You shouldn’t laugh; your judgment is unfair.
You animals pee downwards: I can pee up in the air.

The animals felt sorry that their judgment was so harsh;
They went outside the cave to pee, and made a sort of marsh.

They went around on four legs, whereas Tarzan stood up tall,
Acclaimed to be foremost and highest peer of all.

***

Grey Tapes ver978.iem

I am a simple human ape,
Constrained by red adhesive tape,
Obliged to do what's right and proper
By social law, by code or copper;
By light of day or dark of night,
Obliged to do what's good and right.

And yet, despite my human shape,
I'm little but a hairless ape,
From monkey-business set apart
By subtle mind and caring heart,
Distinguished from orangutan
By Nature, still evolving man.

Blue ribbons marked my babyhood.
I lay, I learned to crawl, I stood.
White ribbons marked our marriage vows
(As due propriety allows)
While yellow tapes in survey plans
Delimit Nature's realm from man's.

The bonds of friendship bind our friends
Till sable tape attests our ends:
Black ribbons bind with mortal crepes.

From cradle sheets to somber crepes,
We humans, we are but great apes.

***

MEDICAL

Self-assertion ver.845.fro

From her inside, growing stronger,
I, with still a month to go,
Kicked my mother in the belly -
Just to let her know.

Prisoned still in wooden palings
Beyond which I could not go,
I would scream when I was hungry
So that they should know.

I was good at sums and spelling;
Sometimes, too, at tell-and-show.
After school, I beat my playmates -
Just to let them know.

I enlisted when my country
Stood to face a foreign foe.
I bore arms, and sometimes used them,
So that they should know.

Faced with some impending issue -
Basic change or status quo –
When I balloted, I voted
So that they should know.

As my faculties grow feeble
My intolerances grow;
More and more, I choose to grumble -
Just to let them know.

When my epitaph is graven
And they lay me deep and low,
Cut my name in polished granite
So that you should know.

* * *

Senses ver844.ido

I don’t see clearly any more;
  I don’t hear very well.
My sense of taste is not too good -
  Likewise my sense of smell.

But I’ve an active sense of duty;
  My sense of humour’s unimpaired.
I still retain a sense of beauty
  In subjects seen and pleasures shared.

My sense of dignity is strong;
  My sense of values, somewhat free.
My moral sense, of right or wrong,
  Is tempered by contingency.

I tend to feel a sense of guilt
  When conscious of a blunder,
But fortunately still retain
  My youthful sense of wonder.

* * *

Now the Fall Semester's ended,
  All the grades have been assigned
And the theses, well defended,
  Out of sight and out of mind.

Now my leisure, long awaited,
  Must be spent for eye exams
As nay aged eyes, dilated,
  Cope with spots and diagrams.

For my pupils, loved or hated -
  Academic hopes and fears –
Here I sit, with eyes dilated,
  Weeping bitter yellow tears.

* * *

Farewell ver794.far

Farewell a rebel bit of me
  That menaces my life:
We soon shall part in surgery
  Beneath the doctor's knife.

  He'll cut you all away, I trust,
While I lie in a coma,
  And when I wake - as wake I must –
I'll be sans carcinoma.

Farewell a section of my gut -
  A length of lower colon.
(He'll leave enough above, I trust,
  To save my mortal soul on.)

  And then, I hope, I shall remain
When pain no longer bows me -
  To face the busy world again
As long as age allows me.

* * *

Happy Belly ver791.myp

My prospects for survival are no longer under par,
And little can be seen beyond an infra-navel scar.
I look much as I used to do, there's little new to see
As evidence for parts removed in major surgery.

My abdomen, once sleek and smooth (to sun-bathers who knew it)
Bears just a trans-Atlantic ridge as evidence to show it.
The staples now are gone (though not the underlying stitches)
And what I feel, still lingering on, are places where it itches,

When I retire to bed each night, and lay my midriff bare,
I see my naked abdomen, that grins from here to there –
No longer blighted by a wen, a tumour or a pile –
Its contents now concealed behind a cicatricial smile.

* * *

Jose of the i-v league ver765.jos

Jose bears my sacs of solution
  With sugar and salts for my veins
And buzzers that beep
  To arouse me from sleep
Whenever no fluid remains

Jose also carries containers
  For urine, that constantly flows
From my intimate pubes
  Through a system of tubes
Among valves designed never to close

Jose has a kind of computer
  With numbers and letters and signs
And buttons you press
  When in doubt or distress
As emergency practice defines

Jose is my constant companion
  He faithfully stands by my side
And when I go out
  For my walking about
He acts as retainer and guide

Jose is forever beside me
  He rolls on five bakelite wheels
And when I am gowned
  He just trundles around
Till my much-sutured abdomen heals

Jose, I may soon be departing
  And sadly must leave you behind
But when I go free
  You will still be with me
As a spirit, a-beep in my mind

* * *

Roll over ver915.whe

When I was but an infant I produced a lot of wind
When lying naked in my cot or firmly underpinned.
They picked me up and patted me with tender loving care
And sometimes I rewarded them with borborygmous air.
I cried, or burbled joyfully, and sometimes even laughed
While generously liberating my gases fore and aft.

Roll over, roll over...

When I in adolescence lay disporting on the grass
With other ‘teens (who’d eaten beans) it often came to pass
That we would pass a little gas to join the summer wind.
And sometimes we just snuggled up, and sometimes we just sinned.
Expelling gut effluvia to join the summer wind.

Roll over, roll over...

But now I’m old and portly, and respectable and rich,
Our budget sheets are white as snow. (Our hearts are black as pitch)
In formal the meetings of the board, I try to play my part,
And at my end I just pretend, when audibly I fart,
(A gaseous expression to which academics tend)
That it was due to someone sitting at the other end.

Now as we check our balances, I’m (so to speak) in clear
For nobody can finger me (at least until next year).

Roll ever, roll over...

* * *

Lying still: our epitaph ver752.noo

No-one, they say, is “old”, though we
Die steadily, perceptibly,
Degenerating, stage by stage,
Into an over-ripe old age.

More slow and stooped, with clouded lens,
We pass as “senior citizens”.
We grade to dotage by degrees
As “pensioners” or “retirees”.

Though we grow old and, day by day,
Our wits and faculties decay,
They do not call us “old”, though we
Advance into senility.

More wrinkled now, and bald or grey,
Our vital essence ebbs away
Until, beneath a darkling sky,
We “pass away” (we do not “die”).

We who in dotage doddered on,
In time interred, at last have gone.
Of “growing old” they simply lied:
We lived, grew older, waned, and died.

* * *

MEMORIES

Camping on a hillside;
Romping in the snow
10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago.

Singing in the sunshine;
Singing in the rain;
Hiking up a mountain-side
And sliding down again.

Basking on the beaches;
Swimming in the seas;
Climbing over wicket gates
And into apple trees.

Bravely in the daytime;
Boldly in the night –
Though the skies had darkened,
Yet the clouds were bright.

Trudging through a cornfield
Where the poppies used to grow,
10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago.

* * *

I tend to faint on seeing blood.
I dread a catastrophic flood.
In fear of accidents aquatic
I store my treasures in the attic
In which I keep an oaken trunk
For documents and other junk,

Though later on, I can't recall
What I have stored up there at all.
Forgetting, after hour or minute,
Whatever I have hidden in it.

Old elephants have trunks, and they
Remember things from day to day.

Bowed down by long-forgotten cares,
No longer generating heirs,
I grow forgetful, old and bald,
And honour good St. Erconwald.
I crave his blessings, even yet,
Lest I forget - lest I forget.

* * *

Sleep ver843.ins

In summer, on a sultry sunny day,
I watch the distant cricketers at play.
  “How’s that?” they shout, or sometimes “Leg before!” ...
  And then ... I fall asleep, and see no more.

I like to fish, and watch a floatied hook
Beside a lake or by a shady brook.
  The water ripples by me, clear and deep.
  I nod and, catching nothing, fall asleep.

“Boheme” and “Butterfly” - I love them all
At home, or in a comfortable stall;
  But, by the second act, I often tend
  To drowse, and fall asleep before the end.

Our lives, enmeshed with happiness or grief,
Pass all too fast, ephemeral and brief,
  On pathways convoluted, plane or steep,
  And, ultimately, all must fall asleep.

* * *

FOOD AND CLOTHING

I yearn for the dills of my childhood,
When people retained the real skill
To make a preserve with a taste we deserve:
True cucumbers pickled with dill.

I don't like the ones on the market:
At best, they're just run-of-the-mill,
With mustard and garlic to fill up the jar,
But nary a sprig of true dill.

They're coloured a bilious yellow.
(The garlic makes some of us ill.)
But no-one, it seems, sells the dills of my dreams,
The pickles with genuine dill.

I yearn for the dills of my childhood.
I'll never be happy until
My hamburger's graced with a pickle's true taste -
Original pickles with dill.

* * *

Chickens ver730.emp

The Empire Kosher Poultry fields a team -
A hundred dedicated rabbonim -
  Who, like the Roman priests with holy water,
  Confer a blessing on the birds they slaughter.

They pluck and package fowls, that we may dine –
With David's star as their approval sign
  Of purity (and somewhat higher price) –
  On grandma's chicken soup with matzoh-kleis.

* * *

Post-prandium ver972.afl

After Christmas dinner, Uncle Herb
Dozed beneath his sign “Do not disturb”.
Aunty Harriet and Aunty Nelly
Scoffed the cranberry-and-apple jelly.
Cousin Wilbur, cousin Jane and I
Finished off the home-made pecan pie,
Whereas, as he slept, poor Uncle Bert
Didn’t even get his just dessert.

***

Eating Out ver907.spe

Spend the early hours of night
Eating out by candle-light.

And select a choice venue
With, perhaps, an ocean view.

After choosing such a venue
Take a seat and read the menu.

First, a soup - a bouillabaisse
(Contents? Anybody's guess.)

Next, a simple entremet
Or the salad of the day
With some dressing from the bar -
French, or oil and vinegar.

Main course: steak, well done or rare,
With, of course, some pommes de terre
Or, if you're beset by doubts,
Broccoli or Brussels sprouts.

Their dessert is sure to please:
Slice of gateau en cerises.

Take a glass of port, wine-red,
(Or maybe a white instead).
There are fruits around the table:
Help yourself, if you are able.

Last, perhaps, the course that pleases:
Various exotic cheeses.

Coffee from a tall carafe –
Plain, expresso or decaf,
And a choice of fine liqueur.
Which of these would you prefer?

Waiter, bring us, if you will,
The inevitable bill
With, recorded on the slip,
Tax and statutory tip
For the choice that's never hard:
Currency or credit card?

You've consumed all you could eat
And you stagger to the street,
Closely followed, without question,
By a touch of indigestion.

* * *

“Come in, come in!” said the genial king,
Brushing mosquitoes and flies away,
“Thankful for what our good gods may bring,
We’re having clergyman stew today.

Welcome, traveler! Rest at last.
Welcome to share in our royal repast.
Come by the fire and take a seat.
We’ve wine and water, and much to eat.
Plenty remains in our simmering pot.
Later tonight we must eat the lot.

When we found him, the Reverend Jones,
Seemed to be little little but skin and bones,
Thin white bottom and shrunken cheeks;
We had to fatten him up for weeks.

Reverend Smith was even thinner,
That’s why we’re having just Jones for dinner.
(They’d been sent here in Christian missions,
Aiming to cure us of superstitions.)

We think missionaries are nice,
Simmered slowly, with sage and rice.
“Arm and a leg” we call this stew.
There’s certainly more than enough for you.
Snack on the fingers, but save the ring.
Bon appetit!” said the cannibal king.

* * *

The robes of Commencement ver723.whe

When I put on my cap and gown
I also don a pensive frown,
A solemn academic gait
And gestures gracious and sedate.
I wear my square as ‘twere a crown:
I find my throne, and settle down.

When I put on my cap and gown
With other dons of high renown,
I watch, in unaccustomed ease,
The grave conferring of degrees
On callow youths and maidens, who
Achieved what they set out to do.

But, after this fine matinee,
I leave the stage, to walk away
To be once more a common prof
And take my noble raiment off,
And join, beyond that exit door,
The ordinary world once more.

* * *

My new shorts ver851.ifi

If I were an insect, I'd be like a bee -
No busier, happier insect than me!
I'd rustle my wings with a smile on my face,
And three pairs of trousers would add to my grace.

If I were a cricket, I'd sing like a bird -
No merrier cricket would ever be heard.
I'd jump with my thorax inflated with pride,
With three pairs of shorts on my happy backside.

But I'm just a person, and, unlike the ants,
Cannot go around wearing three pairs of pants.
So this is my fate - and the end of this rhyme:
To wear only one pair of shorts at a time.

* * *

Cross-dressing ver779.iwe

I wear a kind of underpants
  That fit me nice and tight.
They have a slit or orifice
  That opens to the right.

This handy aperture or gap
  (As men will all agree)
Lets fellows get their penis out
  When they must stand and pee.

As all right-minded people know,
  This is the proper way
Of making jockey underpants:
  The style is here to stay.

But when I broke my right-hand wrist,
  I thought, without a doubt,
My pants would get a left-hand slit
  If put on inside-out.

Alas, the penis aperture
  (I wish I knew its name)
Retains its old direction,
  Facing rightwards just the same.

It's hard to get my penis out
  When I must stand and pee
(And what left-handed people do
  Remains a mystery).

* * *

A la mode (after Hillaire Belloc) ver953.som

Some girls we see, or even meet
In ‘buses, bars, or on the street,
Reveal discreetly, now and then,
A zone of naked abdomen.
They must select their clothes whereby
Their belts are loose, their blouses high,
Their tops are short, with jeans set low,
Arranged to let their navels show.
(A fashion somewhat strange and new),
Exposing now to public view
A swash of unencumbered skin –
A midriff with a dimpled grin.

They demonstrate in modern style
An abdomen that wears a smile
And so display, in manner chaste,
Their joie de vivre around the waist.

Times

Eastern Time:

Eastern time:
Scratch a dollar, lose a dime.
Seek the most, and find the least
In the Far (sophistic) East.

Central Time:
Central time,
Where the median paradigm
Strikes a happy mean by not
Waiting till the iron's hot.

Mountain time:

Mountain time,
Where the people have to climb
Up the hills and down the dales
Until gas, or muscle, fails.

Pacific Time;

Pacific time
Where they struggle to increase
Income, status, wealth or power
Garnered in the extra hour.

Standard time;

Standard time,
Where the limey sips his lime
Or his cup of timeless tea.
(Water's good enough for me.)

* * *

The cycle of the seasons ver817.pri

Prides of lions
Come in the Fall -
Some Autumn
(But don't).
Cold overcomes
Overgoats.
Winter winds
Roaring and foaming.
New Tide
Marches in time
Like a Maine lion
And goes out
Poof!
Like a New Hampshire
Lamp
Marching down the dark drain.
Then comes April
With sprinkles.
It might -
But May not.
Spring cleaning, clinging
Grime is loosened.
Rime thaws,
And seasons,
With seedless reasons,
Come round again
After a knock-out
Summer –
While some are not.

Prides of lions
Come in the Fall
et seq.

* * *

In the lands beyond the Nile,
  In the Narryer Gneiss Terrane,
Valley, Graham, Peck and Wilde
  Found a little zircon grain -

Just a tiny purple zircon
  Sorted from some crushed debris,
Scarcely big enough to work on -
  Barely big enough to see;

Yet they analyzed the gases
  From that particle's inclusions,
And, from isotopic masses,
  Drew remarkable conclusions.

Since those gases could be dated
  Half as old as Mother Earth,
Their research is justly rated
  Of inestimable worth

Geochemists, ever hopeful
  For the dating of our land,
Study gases isotopeful
  Even from its grains of sand.

* * *

Ripples that cross
And waves that churn the stream
  Never return.

The leaves that clothe
  Oak trees and maples
Over the misty hills
  Redden and fall.

White snows that cover them
  Melt under warming suns
Until soft spring-awakened trees
  Open their buds again.

Stones do not fade,
  Nor do the rocks grow old.
There are short times,
  Long times,
    No times at all.

* * *

Yesterday, today - and tomorrow? ver903.pit

Pity the poor dinosaur, who never smelled a rose;
Never saw a blade of grass where now a meadow grows;
Never saw a daffodil or slept beside a willow;
Never had a pile of hay to rest on as a pillow;
Never saw an elephant and never smelled a rat.
(Dinosaurs became extinct long ages before that.)

Pity Cleopatra who, in spite of rank and wealth
Hadn't our amenities for happiness and health.
Never had an aspirin for remedying pain;
Never drove a motor-car or travelled in a train;
Never used a telephone or saw electric light
(Though perhaps she may have witnessed lightning in the night);
Never knew potato chips, tomato sauce or rum;
Never ate a chocolate bar or chewed a bar of gum;
Never owned a fountain pen or read a printed book
Never had a microwave (she never learned to cook).

So I am glad I'm living now, in days and times like these,
To drive on comfortable roads or steam across the seas.

If ever I am born again (I can't imagine how)
Would I be even better off, millennia from now?

***

As shadows of the Eighties fade
To recent history,
We usher in a new decade
In MCMXC.

Shall we have apple, or but core,
From sea to shining sea?
We wonder what may lie in store
In MCMXC.

Dictatorships have come and gone,
Replaced by liberty.
The juggernaut of time rolls on
To MCMXC.

Will Left and Right still pull apart,
Or will the twain agree,
Rejoicing in a change of heart
In MCMXC?

The prospects certainly look bright,
As far as one can see.
Let's hope that things work out all right
In MCMXC.

* * *

The Year of the Dog

Now the year of Cock has ended,
Let us see destruction mended:
Flood and forest fire and fog
Chased and conquered by the Dog.

Stupid, tragic wars must end:
Wounds must heal and fences mend.
Let the ghetto shootings cease
And the gangs disarm for peace.

From this noble New Year's Day,
Let us seek a better way:
Compromise and dialogue
Mediated by the Dog.

As the Rooster spreads his wings,
Let us wish you better things:
Health and wealth and all good cheer
In the coming Canine Year.

* * *

This is the year of the rat.
Now what should we do about that?

* * *

We can't have a roast, as we did with a pig,
And barbecued rat wouldn't go over big.

I think it was dogs, in the year before last.
(The years seem to roll round exceedingly fast.)

It could have been roosters the year before that,
But what should we eat in the year of the rat?

There's turkeys at Christmas, when turkeys are fat.
I think I would rather have turkey than rat.

I'd settle for grouse at the drop of a hat,
Or partridge or pheasant - but baulk at a rat.

Next year, it's the bullock, or something like that;
But what should we eat in the year of the rat?

* * *

SPACE

Beyond Gravity ver772.our

Our seven noble astronauts ascended in a ship
With nine and twenty cultivated rats.
A hundred score of jellyfish were taken on the trip,
Suspended in aquatic thermostats.

The astronauts completed all their tasks in outer space:
The rats survived in admirable style:
But all those little jellyfish - the highest of their race
Were terrified, and trembled all the time.

The "Challenger" re-landed with its super-human load:
The rats recovered really very well.
The jellyfishes, too, survived - which ultimately showed
That gravity does not affect a gel.

* * *

Should we not protest to Hale and Bopp?
Some of their emissions ought to stop.

Dust is harmless from an icy mass,
But monoxide is a toxic gas:
Though it may enhance a comet's glow,
They should not release so much CO.

If a ton a second is emitted,
Then a major nuisance is committed.
It's enough, released in outer space,
To asphyxiate our human race.

Cometry polluters should be forced
To use catalysts in their exhaust.

* * *

Rock Stars ver712.our

("And God so loved the World, he gave us the Beatles"
paraphrased, from J.B.S. Haldane)

Our coleoptrous avatars -
The rhythmic Ringo of the Starrs,
Young George, good Paul and Martyred John -
In orbit yet, have come and gone.

They left their old hepatic pond
And crossed into the Great Beyond:
Harmonic demigods, they came
From microphone to mega-fame.

With music of celestial spheres,
Like carols, ringing in their ears,
They rose in meteoric flight
A long day's journey into night.

Now, circulating through the voids
As supersonic asteroids,
In astronomic name they fly
Across the echoing, vaulted sky.

With tones of yellow submarines
As sound-tracks of empyrean scenes
Above the World, they spin as one:
Four satellites of Sol the Sun.

* * *

(Latest news from radio-astronomy)

Projected, at the speed of light,
From distant realms of outer space
Across millennia of night
Arrives an electronic trace –
Created by the bang that gave
The atoms power to unite
Are traces, sent by micro-wave,
For sulphur hypoiodite.

* * *

There's a light at the end where the firmaments bend;
There are rhythms in heavenly rhyme.
There is music in spheres that is sweet to the ears
At the end of the passage of time.

There are patches of shade where the galaxies fade
From the glow of empyrean space.
There is peace unallowed in the canopied void, .
In the ultimate, virtual grace.

There is music unheard in the aether unstirred;
And melodious echoes sublime.
In the darkness of night there's a glimmer of light
At the end of the passage of time.

When the harmonies tell like the notes of a bell,
And the brasses ring mellow and bright,
The re-echoing sound, as the planets go round,
Can be heard in the passage of light.

* * *

A message received from Mars ver849.asp

As part of a programme to colonize stars
(Though no-one seems certain just when),
I joined in a mission to travel to Mars –
The world of the little green men.

The atmosphere here is much thinner than ours.
The mountains are rugged and high.
The scenery's barren - no trees and no flowers -
And all of rivers run dry.

The Martians are shy and retiring, I've found,
Living under the surface, like mice,
In caverns and galleries far underground
And subsisting on mars-bars and ice.

There are no straight canals, only dry-bottomed streams
In some of the low-lying parts.
Life here is more martian than martial, it seems,
And lacking in marital arts.

I hope, when our mission is over, that I
Can come back to Earth once again,
To a world that has water, with clouds in the sky.
I don't want to have to stay here till I die
In the world of the little green men.

* * *

Martians ver961.our

Our heads are green as willows
And our bodies red as roses;
We've tentacles where you have ears
And eyes below our noses.
We've had our share of troubles
Since our Planet's solar birth,
And we don't need death and taxes
And the bugs you have on Earth.

We Martians aren't as foolish
As your earthly human race,
So when we saw an object
Coming in from outer space –
Perhaps an early salvo
Of a planetary blitz –
We turned our space-guns on it
And we blew this thing to bits.

* * *

TRAVEL

Thief ver768.ile

I left my towel - I know just where -
And went to swim along the bay.
When I returned, it was not there –
A thief had taken it away.

I was quite sorry it was lost.
It was expensive, and displayed
The name, indelibly embossed,
Of some hotel where I had stayed.

* * *

Vanity Plates ver715.ono

On our daily motorcade
Between home and schoolhouse gates,
Daughter Annie (second grade)
Likes to read the license plates
Spelling out, with girlish glee,
Acronyms in registrations –
Some of which, admittedly,
Need parental explanations.

2MYLOVE is clear as day,
As is filial 4MYMUM.
Less correct is MAKMYDAY
Or the modest NOTSODUM.

G02L is curt but plain.
More polite is HALOMATE,
But I still have to explain
What is meant by 4NIC8.

On our way to shops or stations,
In and out of towns and states,
Annie looks for explanations
From the lore of license plates.

* * *

The light of fate ver969.sto

Stop light, stop light –
Red is at the top light.
When we come within its range
We must wait for it to change.
It will change assuredly
In a minute, two or three.

Life has setbacks in our way
When the red seems here to stay,
And we wait - but wait in vain -
For the green to come again.

* * *

On a London Double-decker ver717.ima

I'm Ahmed, a semi-conductor.
I work on the 'buses from Bow,
Collecting the fares
At the top of the stairs,
While Ali does likewise below.

We're nobody's lackeys:
We're hard-working Paki's,
Ensuring all fares have been paid
From Pelham to Putney,
We're cockney as chutney -
The semi-conductor brigade.

There's nobody's 'buses
More finer than us's.
We work in inscrutable pairs,
Collecting with unction
From junction to junction
The requisite omnibus fares.

* * *

Passing through ver680.one

One sunny day in early May
A laden German tourist 'bus
Came down the scenic Watling Way
And halted just ahead of us.

From castles, palaces and zoos,
En route to royal parks and tombs,
We had to breathe - we could not choose –
Their all-pervading diesel fumes.

As they discussed, in Teuton tongue,
Such masterworks as Goethe's "Faust"
And Wagner's "Gotterdammerung",
Our lot inspired their car's exhaust.

They sat and waited for their guide;
But when at last they chose to start,
We read, along their 'bus's side,
The explanation: "Touristfart".

* * *

Rush hour ver977.her

Here we come, the standing orders,
Office fellows just like us,
Collared, tied and business-suited
Edging slowly down the 'bus.

Sober citizens with cases,
Neatly clad in grey or black,
Off towards our daily duties,
Slowly edging to the back.

Freshly shaved, unsmiling faces -
Serious and sombre chaps,
Clinging to the handy railings,
Hanging on along the straps.

(Portly dames, with shopping laden,
Occupying every seat,
Leaving us officionados
Scarcely space to shuffle feet.)

Here we stand, the daily dozen,
Courteous, calm, with little fuss,
Edging slowly to our duties,
Brachiating down the 'bus.

* * *

The reluctant oceanographer ver725.for

For explorations I've not much urge.
I don't like swells and I can't stand surge.
I never relish the pitch and toss
(I'm more of a stone that'll gather moss).
I'd rather stick with my garden soil
Than rock on the ocean with bilge and oil,
With diesel fumes and the smell of swill -
I'm happier far where the ground is still.
So I'd rather not go to sea - no, no –
Whatever you think of me,
For it doesn't appear to agree with me
Whenever I'm out at sea.

I'd rather sit in my cosy home
Than board a vessel that plies the foam,
For the heaving motions of waves and tides
Have awful effects on my poor insides.
I'd rather sit on my stable tail,
Answering 'phones and the morning mail,
Than try to work on the stormy seas
On a chilly night with a 40-knot breeze.
So I'd rather not go to sea - no, no-
etc.

When the seas are high and the going's tough
Things bounce around when the ocean's rough:
The gimbels swivel, the sprockets sprock
While gantries wobble and stanchions rock.
I'd rather stay within sight of Scripps,
And leave for others those ocean trips.
I'm happier far in my office chair
Than on expeditions from here to there.
So I'd rather not go to sea - no, no –
etc.
I've lots of colleagues who sail the foam
Instead of remaining back here at home.
With stronger stomachs and stouter hearts
They gather data, and fish, and charts.
But do discomforts upon the brine
Make data so gathered worth more than mine?
I can sit around and get just as tanned
In my own back yard or the sea-side sand.
So I'd rather not go to sea - no, no –
etc.

The baby-changing room ver909.why

Why d'a want ta change ya baby?
Don't ya like the way it looks?
Does it never coo –
Or whatever babies do
According to the baby books?

Why d'a want ta change ya baby?
Don't ya like its nose or eyes –
Its little private parts
Or the way it burps or farts?
Don't ya like the way it cries?

Why d'a want ta change ya baby?
Did ya only want a boy
And got a girl instead,
Or was it just an accident
That happened in ya bed?

Why d'a want ta change ya baby?
Don't it make ya warm and tender?
Don't ya like its size
Or the way the creature cries?
Don't ya even like its gender?

Why d'a want ta change ya baby?
Isn't it a trifle strange
Now that you've begot
An angel – or a sot –
Why d'ya now decide to change?

Why d'a want ta change ya baby?
Is it too damn big, or small?
Is it too damn fat?
(They tend to get like that) –
Why d'ya have a child at all?

* * *

Upgrade ver790.alt

Although our first departure was delayed,
We flew from San Diego happy-hearted,
But learned our next connection had departed.
But later, as our hopes began to fade -

Our ultimate arrival would be late –
The prospect left us peevish, vexed and jaded,
Until, by some fair quirk of subtle fate
We found ourselves appreciably up-graded.

Although we had to take a later flight,
We left the huddled lower-middle masses
To travel safely, later through the night.
In greater comfort with the business classes.

And now, replete with caviar and gin,
In seating-space as long as it is wide,
I wallow in the space I'm sitting in
And, finally, I'm more than satisfied.

* * *

Flying over the World ver831.lea

Leaving airfields, leaving cities
Rising from our airport berth,
Up and out towards the heavens –
Out across a patchwork Earth.

Barren furlongs lying fallow:
Hills of forest, green and black:
Rectangles of rapeseed yellow:
Roadway, river, railway track:
Narrow fields, where feudal tenants
Tithed their crops in lieu of rent:
Distant hills and dim horizons
Fading to the firmament:
Plots outlined by penciled hedges:
Pastures rimmed by unseen wire:
Ox-bow loops with white-sand edges:
Stubble, smoking still from fire.

There a winding river widens
Out to join some distant sea,
Glinting briefly in the sunshine,
Dimming to obscurity.

Leaving airfields, leaving cities
With our contrail flags unfurled,
Up and out, towards the heavens,
Out across a patchwork World.

* * *

Summer 1994 ver774.alt

Although our first departure was delayed,
We flew from San Diego happy-hearted.
Our hopes for catching up began to fade
When told our next connection had departed.

Our ultimate arrival would be late.
The prospect left us peevish, vexed and jaded
Until, by some fair quirk of subtle fate,
We managed to get other seats up-graded.

Although we had to take a later flight,
We left the huddled lower-middle masses
To travel safely, later through the night,
In greater comfort with the business classes.

So now, replete with caviar and gin,
With seating-space as long as it is wide,
We wallow in the luxury we're in.
We're ultimately more than satisfied.

* * *

On an airline magazine ver855.ili

I like to read THE SILVER KRIS
On many varied tropics.
I like its tables, maps and charts
Of routes and ports in foreign parts
From Europe to Antipodes
And from the poles to tropics.

Its diverse articles increase
My knowledge of the World,
And every interesting piece
Appearing in THE SILVER KRIS
Is apt to make the time fly by
While I myself am flying high,
Enjoying art and information
As I approach my destination.

* * *

Instructions from an air hostess before take-off ver850.don

Don't stuff your sack in the pack rack, Jack,
For the lock at the back's got stuck.
You can stick your sack on the back-pack stack
At the back, where there's space (with luck).
There's a crack in the rack where the snacks are stacked,
So it cannot be used, in fact,
Until Mac, with a jack, can unstick the back
Of the track where the snack stack's stuck.

* * *

For tourists from a foreign land
It's sometimes hard to understand
How Dutchmen normally agree
To talk with us, quite fluently,
In German, French, or any such
A Western tongue, instead of Dutch,
While many, I suppose, can speak
Italian, or even Greek.
For us, strange tongues are double-dutch,
So thank you, Dutchmen, very much

* * *

PLACES

Memories of Belize ver745.apo

A pot-pourri of motley memories
From wonderful excursions in Belize:

Swamp cypresses, with rising roots and knees
Along lagoons, where stooping mangrove trees
Extend their loping legs into the seas,

While crested cormorants, or kiskadees,
Take fish or flies - or simply take their ease
Among the leafy branching canopies
That rustle in the balmy on-shore breeze,

And reef-edge shallows, where a diver sees
Brain corals, fans, and sea anemones
In crystal water (eighty-five degrees) -

Could one have richer memories than these?

* * *

The nights in Palau ver696.ify

If you live in range of 'buses,
City streets and city lights,
You cannot conceive the darkness
And the peace of tropic nights.

If you stay in urban jostles
Under inter-city flights,
You can never know the silence
Of these velvet tropic nights -

Nights so still that slender ripples
Lace the sea like silver bars,
When you almost hear the tinkle
Of a hundred thousand stars;

Nights without a leaf to rustle;
Nights without a sea-bird's call;
Silent nights, when you can sense
A subtle silence over all.

Somewhere in the coastal thickets
Some small insect, shy and shrill,
Cuts a crevice in the silence
For a moment, and is still.

Somewhere, under even waters,
Unseen fishes stir the sea
Briefly; then the rippled surface
Settles to tranquility.

You that stay in urban splendour
Where the boulevards are bright
Never taste the heady nectar
Of a calm Palauan night.

* * *

On sun-girt beaches, wreathed in happy smiles,
They lived at peace among the Sandwich Isles.
The maidens ate as much as they could wish
Of yam and taro, coconut and fish.
In modest skirts of itchy tapa cloth,
They sought communion with the Behemoth.

Now double-chinned, indigenous polloi
Take second helpings of two-finger poi
And, inch by inch, expanding in their girth,
They grow, the most pneumatic maids on earth.

In scented tiers of frangipani leis,
Enlarging through the years of summer days,
The plump vahines, innocent of guiles,
Epitomise the triple-sandwich isles.

* * *

An old, brown man tells us ver698.myw

My wife and children lived with me -
O, this was many years ago –
Beside a sunny tropic sea
In times my boys no longer know.

Between the reefs along the shore
We swam, or waded through a gap.
The ocean was our only store:
Our island home, Elugelap.

A ship came to our land one day.
A white man in a navy cap
Persuaded us to go away -
And so we left Elugelap.

And now there is no trace of land,
No coral reef beyond the foam.
There are no palms, no hills of sand -
The seas have covered up our home.

Now, sharks and flying-fish abound
Where once we set our lobster trap,
But there remains no fishing ground
Where once there was Elugelap.

No-one can calculate our loss.
You will not find it on the map.
There is a hole, a mile across,
Where once there was Elugelap.

* * *

God save the king of Laos ver374.son

Son of the line of Sam Sen Tai,
Sisavang Vong is King, we cry!

The future strength of the line derives
From Sisavang Vong and his fifteen wives,
Who sit in the palace-, and play Phang Tong,
Living in pleasure with dance and song.

Gnam after gnam they play and sing,
Till the walls of interior chambers ring
With gong and with .cymbals that clash and clang
Round the echoing walls of Luang Prabang.

Hail the Laotian King! Live long,
Your Royal Majesty, Sisavang Vong!

(I wrote this in 1954, but some decades later had to add this postscript)

The King of Laos is now no more:
Another master runs the store,
And, from some less pretentious house,
There rules a Commissar of Laos.

* * *

Mee-an-mar or My-an-mar, I neither know nor care.
It's in S.E. Asia somewhere, somewhere over there
Off past Chittagong, along the road to Mandalay
Where the signs say "Burma-shave" along the dusty way.

Chittagong is not the kind of brazen gong you bang on:
It's a busy city almost half as big as Yangon.
(These are zany names that tend to baffle anybody
Never having junked across the muddy Irrawaddy.)

What we knew as Burma, what we used to call Rangoon,
Now are less familiar than the mountains of the Moon.
Countries are like roses, and by any other name
Keep their places on our maps, and smell about the same,

* * *

Nile at dawn ver76l.moo

The moon is almost full, and moonlight dominates the scene.
Frogs on the islets call among dark reeds.
The water surface glistens, for the air is cold and still.
Loose clumps of water-hyacinth glide past.

Last night's warm, golden glow has turned to silver in this dawn.
The skyline to the distant west is grey.
Against a line of darker hills, a dozen lamp-points shine
From human settlements as yet unseen.

Tall date-palms stand beside dim fields along the distant bank,
And, from afar, an early cockerel crows.
While, on a nearby island, bushes bloom with white egrets -
Like flowers in the early morning light -

Their waking cries reflected, like the image of the moon,
Upon the mirroring water. Suddenly
They fly away in swirling flocks, and head towards the south,
To breakfast in some chosen fishing grounds.

A boat appears beside the reeds, with two grey, silent men
Who spent night's vigil in a hut of reeds.
One splashes on the water with a stick to stir up fish,
Blurring their two inverted images.

We see more colour now. Upstream, the fields are yellow-green.
While on our shore, two figures - black-robed men –
Are kneeling, bowed and pious, in their early morning prayer.
A bigger grey-green boat goes chugging past

With three more dark and silent men (it could be six,
If we include reflections in the Nile.)
The sky is lighter now. Below the line of distant hills,
We see a lower line of ancient tombs.

Grey smoke from burning sugar-cane obscures the waning moon
Above the banks of fresh-hewn limestone blocks.
A hooded crow flaps past. Dogs bark. A distant donkey brays,
And unseen plovers whistle overhead.

A scattering of egrets - six, then ten, and then a score -
Stake out their pondweed patches by the reeds,
And stab for passing fish, or fly away along the shore
To seek a bay with more or bigger frogs.

Two herons fly away. The air is somewhat warmer now,
And midges are emerging from the mud –
Faint, dancing motes, unseen except against the rising sun
That now appears above the rocky hills,

In pairs and threes, sand martins, flying low towards the south,
Have left their nest-holes, lined along the banks.
A twittering of sparrows, louder than the later frogs,
Has joined the morning chorus in the reeds.

While unseen doves coo softly in the eucalyptus trees,
A kingfisher flies by, from shore to shore.
A schooner, blue and white, arrives, with smaller boat in tow,
Leaving a rippled V across the Nile.

The white smoke, rising slowly from a morning cook-fire,
Brings subtle smells of burning straw, and dung,
And blends with sweet aromas, orange blossom and field beans –
It's now today.

* * *

Souk at dawn ver760.car

Card-boxes fall apart, and beer-caps rust
Beneath flaked shutters decked with drying rags.
Cool breezes stir dried droppings into dust
As ground-doves pick among thin plastic bags.

The air is redolent along the street
Of last night's deals with men from foreign lands
As tracks of wheels, small hoofs and sandalled feet
Blend slowly into patternings of sands.

The cleaners garner while the city sleeps.
Thin cats and pigeons look for bones and seeds
While black goats browse, among the rubbish heaps,
On paper, peels, and little roadside weeds.

Pert, dusty sparrows on acacia trees
Chirp softly, or stay silent for a while
As they resume their search for fallen peas
Among the shards of pottery and tile

Or peels and fragments overlooked by goats.
Now there are other sounds: a water cart
Is trundled by, emitting creaking notes
As if it were about to fall apart.

Devised to lighten tedium and toil,
A curious machine beside a stall
Succumbs to rust, and age, and lack of oil.
Tall, tapered jugs stand propped against a wall,

Long empty, in their low, splay-legged rack.
A skinny bitch, all ribs, with up-coiled tail
Assays a feeble bark, and then turns back
To rummaging from pail to fallen pail,

Limping along a shaded alleyway
Where beams of early morning sunshine glint
On shards of bottles men have cast away –
Paste gemstones of a green or yellow tint.

An unseen cock, awaking on his perch,
Crows once. An early brown and fussy hen
Looks up a moment from her hungry search
For fallen morsels, and looks down again.

A lad appears, grey-robed to naked feet,
In begging pennies wise beyond his years.
A motor hooter in a far-off street
Announces morning. Other life appears.

(This is no Pharaonic age B.C.
But modern Egypt, 1993.)

Another lad, whose donkey, thin and grey,
Plods slow but steady through the dusty air,
Is off to school, or to a mosque to pray
(For now we start to hear the calls to prayer.)

Padlocks are opened; shutters start to rise,
Revealing crates of onions, peppers, beans,
And bins of spices, pulses, salts and dyes,
Small plastic basins, coils of rope, blue jeans …

Black-robed, black-slippered dames, in threes and fours,
With necklaces of shining metal beads
(The sun has risen higher than the stores)
Bear living geese, or baskets, or dried reeds.

A turbaned man, who put aside his load
Perhaps to rest, or for a silent prayer,
Sits here alone beside the littered road
(He chose to stop and rest – but why just there?)

While others sit on stools, or white-washed rocks,
Sucking on hookahs, sipping cups of tea
Prepared by someone on a black fire-box,
Waiting for later, and what is to be.

A group of boys – tan-jackets all awry –
Stroll chattering of plots or secret fun,
And girls, blue-trousered and white-shawled, walk by.
A ‘bus arrives.
        The day has now begun.

* * *

Quetzalcoatl - quetzalhatl - quetzalgoatl - quetzalcattl
Quetzalpigl - quetzalclover - quetzalcupl runneth over.

Quetzalkettl - quetzalfishl - quetzalmetl - quetzaldishl
Quetzalpotl - quetzalcrackl - quetzalbotl moneybackl.

Quetzalbitl - quetzaltotal - quetzalsickl - quetzalcoatl
Finally, the jumbo jetzl take us back - back - back –
Back to Metzl-baum and pretzl.

* * *

The Romans, who camped here
En route to Belle France,
Proclaimed it a "colony"
Par excellence.

The French, who came later
(I cannot tell when),
Inserted a "g"
Just in front of the "n".

Then Germans appended
Two dots on the "ö"
For reasons that only
A German could know .

The French then returned
And, as surely well known,
Created the perfume
Called "eau de Cologne".

Thus cultures evolve,
With their ebb and their flow
Recorded in names
And reflected in eau.

* * *

There is much to do and see
Here in Thessaloniki:
Much to see and more to do –
Much that may astonish you.
Churches new and churches old,
Treasuries of ancient gold;
Coronets still gleam and glow,
Fabricated long ago
In the days of ancient Greece.
Underground, through war and peace
Buried in ancestral tombs,
Sepulchers and catacombs,
Until they were excavated
Carefully restored and dated.
Later still the Romans came,
Laying military claim
To these lands beside the sea –
Ancient Thessaloniki.
Others - some of whom had come
Here from far Byzantium –
Came and settled, leaving stones,
Walls and cultures, art and bones:
Treasures now are still to find,
Mounted, labeled and enshrined
In displays for all to see
Here in Thessaloniki.

* * *

Wimbledon, 1987 ver672.gam

Games are rarely safety matches;
Races rarely to the fleet.
Thunder showers stream in patches
Down along the sodden street.

Cats and dogs are all that's pouring;
Deuces court the humid sets.
Nobody is left for scoring;
Fishes school around the nets.

Water service is our symbol
When the summer suns have gone,
Slowly, slowly flows the Wimble;
Softly, softly flows the Don.

Rain, that washes all before it,
Rinses tournaments away.
Nobody is left to score it;
Everyone is right to pray.

Czechs and Germans notwithstanding,
Weather has the final call.
Seeded first, or left still standing,
Sodden harvests are love-all.

Games go rarely to the nimble
When the summer suns have gone
And the over-flowing Wimble
Rushes headlong to the Don.

* * *

I asked them in the 'buses
And I asked them in the trains.
I asked them up and down the Steppes
And on the open plains.
I asked the men in Moscow
And I asked the men in Minsk
"What happened to the other half
Of Semipalatinsk?"

* * *

POLLUTION

O, give me a shack
By the side of the track
Where the garbage is piled in the street:
Where the cops have to go
Three or four in a row
If they want to survive on the beat.

Home, home in L.A.,
Where the pushers and prostitutes play;
Where is frequently heard
That old four-letter word
And the skies remain gloomy all day.

O, give me a car
Where the vehicles are
Plastered over with stickers and grime:
Where the over-weight jog
Through the dust and the smog
And the traffic gets worse all the time.

Home, home in L.A.,
... (etc.)

O give me a lot
By the side of a plot
Where the buildings block most of the sky;
Where the hope of work fades
For the unemployed blades
As the years roll relentlessly by.

Home, home in L.A.,
… (etc.)

* * *

Conservation ver964.loo

Set 1.

Looking backwards, what is it we see?
Woodlands on the hillside and the plain;
Chaparral, or rivers running free;
Seasons dry, or seasons under rain.

Looking round us, what is it we see?
Suburbs that developers have made:
Roads and houses, here and there a tree
(Eucalyptus casts but little shade.)

Looking forward, what is it we'll see?
Offices with brick and concrete walls;
Parking spaces (for a modest fee);
Supermarkets, banks and super-malls.

Set 2.

Looking backwards, what is it we see?
Stands of kelp, with otters by the score;
Lobsters, mussels, clams in quantity;
Abalones on the rocky shore.

Looking round us, what is it we see?
Schools of anchovies and of sardines
Fast declining to mortality
(Unless legislation intervenes).

Looking forward, what is it we'll see?
Where once sea-grass grew, or coral reef,
There may be but rubble and debris
When the living things have come to grief

* * *

Smog ver726.wit

With an undetected motion
Comes the smoggy breeze,
Wafting down across the ocean
From Los Angeles,
Down from factories and dock-sides,
Fumes of traffic spread
Hydrocarbons, nitric oxides,
PB's and lead

From that murky conurbation,
Sullying our respiration.
Eyes and ears, and window sills,
Suffer dust and other ills.

Smog, in all its in grimy guises,
Drifts from far away,
Where the hot air rarely rises
O'er the sultry bay.
Clouds of little worth, if any,
Veil the setting sun,
Reddened, like a copper penny,
When the day is done.

In our newer, gentler nation,
Clean air would be our salvation
Save us - even those who jog -
From the all-pervading smog.

* * *

Roll on, Exxon! ver700.spi

The Spill has hit Alaska like the finding of the gold.
It helps us face the darkness and the penetrating cold.
The wind-chill factor's bearable, though brains begin to freeze,
With benefits accruing from the wreck of the "Valdez".

So roll on, Exxon: the oil has come to grease
The flow of legal millions from the wreck of the "Valdez".
Roll on, Exxon, and all that tarry gold
That pays for our discomfort in the darkness and the cold.
Roll on, Exxon ... Roll on!

The otters' coats are tarry, and the puffins lie in shoals.
They wash up dead along the shores (God bless their sorry souls!)
The whales and seals may perish of pollution and disease,
But good for us Alaskans is the wreck of the "Valdez".
So roll on, Exxon ... Roll on!

There's tar upon the ptarmigan and husky, musky ox.
There's sixteen bucks an hour for scrubbing sticky, blackened the rocks.
We rent our humble homestad for a thousand bucks a day,
And live on salmon caviar, since Exxon's there to pay.
So roll on, Exxon ... Roll on!

There's little rooms in Valdez can be rented by the hour
For 20, 30 bucks or more: that's talkin' tiger power!
The boom's back in Alaska now, and people stand and pray
That all the oil will stick around, and won't just wash away.
So roll on, Exxon ... Roll on!

We've never had such fortune and such escalating rates.
They've never been so lucky in the Continental states.
The lawyers make their millions while there's Exxon there to pay,
And the population's praying that the oil is here to stay.
So roll on, Exxon ... Roll on!

We needn't drill, for all this spill is better than a source.
So here's to drunken skippers, and to tankers 'way off course.
The oil flows somewhere, even if the tanker never docks,
So chuck the auto-pilot, lads, and head among the rocks!
And roll on, Exxon ... Roll on!

* * *

Their holds replete with spices, tea,
Silk, ebony and gold,
The Quinqueremes of Nineveh
Bore treasuries untold.

But British shipping, by and large,
Evolves by slow degrees
Till it is now the garbage barge
That rules the seven seas.

Today the flagships of the fleet,
Their grimy flags unfurled,
Bring loads of chaff, instead of wheat,
To purge the dirty world.

From Amsterdam to Istambul,
From Sweden and the States,
We buy it by the ferry-ful
In barrels, skips and crates.

The wastes arrive from far and wide
By freighter, junk and scow,
With garbage for our countryside
And rubbish for our plough.

From harbour docks and transit sheds,
Off-loaded into lorries,
We dump it in our river-beds,
Our cuttings and our quarries.

Poor England's green and pleasant land
Grows dangerous to till.
It's soil is getting poorer, and
Is underlain with fill.

* * *

Nature in the Raw ver753.doy

Do you yearn to be a rover
Travelling on pleasure bent?
Hitch a freighter out of Dover
To the Darkest Continent.
See the Africa that's hidden:
Swamp and veldt and termite mound
Buried underneath a midden -
Industry's last dumping ground.

Would you trip the wild fantastic?
Breathe the heavy, musky scent
Of a solvent or a plastic
In a spoiled environment.
See the native rites and races
Dancing to their tocsin sounds
In unmentionable places
Utilized as dumping grounds.

Toxic wastes, in barrels tinny,
Tend to leak into the floor.
(Someone turns a pretty guinea
Shipping them to Afric's shore.)
Seek the ultimate solution
Where the wildebeest abounds,
Wildlife parks accept pollution
As Europa's dumping grounds.

* * *

Among some more recent deplorable trends
Is the widespread dispersal of cigarette ends.
They're scattered at random in ditches and drains,
In toilets and offices, 'buses and trains,
Discarded by folks who apparently think
That every floor is a bottomless sink,
Please keep our fair cities unsullied and neat,
And don't throw your cigarette ends on the street.

* * *

Gas Conservation ver928.the

The cattle on a dairy farm
Eat quantities of grass,
Converting some of it to beef
And some of it to gas.
(And humans who eat lots of beans
Do much the same, alas.)

To Minnesota citizens
Economy appeals:
They use the People's Natural Gas
To cook their daily meals.

* * *

The Red List ver913.weh

We have seen them come and go
As our culture turns the page.
Life's an evanescent show
On the World's evolving page.

We have seen these, all too rare:
Clouded pard and speckled owl,
Bengal tiger, polar bear,
Rarely spotted guinea-fowl.

Orchids rarely grow on moors -
Never noted there before.
Picnic parties, tourist tours,
See them once, but then no more.

If mankind will not conserve,
These will not be seen again.
We shall get what we deserve:
Locusts on a barren plain.

* * *

Save us! ver719.sav

Save us from deforestation:
Keep the woodlands undefiled:
Save the World from desecration:
Keep it clean, and keep it wild.

Save the trees from clear-cut felling,
Lest the forests of Brazil –
Sacrificed for timber selling -
Grow to look like One-tree Hill.

Save our system from pollution
Or an even graver fate
In an ultimate solution -
Save, before it gets too late.

Let's abjure all leaded fuellings;
Shun all saturated fats,
And observe all local rulings
Introduced by ecocrats.

Heed the gypsy's global warning:
Save the World from PCB's,
Lest we catch, one fateful morning,
Some incurable disease.

Save our seas from foul detergent
And the foaming of the brine.
(Such restraint is more than urgent
On the Danube and the Rhine.)

Doom is on us - doom appalling,
Creeping on us by degrees
Where the coastal cliffs are falling
Down into encroaching seas.

Save our lands from sea-floor spreading:
Save our seas from tidal rise,
Lest the World continue heading
To its ultimate demise.
* * *

The holey sky ver681.our

Our cottage roof leaks, and whenever it rains
The gutters brim over, and so do the drains.
The water's invasive; whenever it falls,
It comes through the ceiling and runs down the walls,

Our sky, too, is leaky. We know, for a fact,
The roof of the World is no longer intact,
And through that essential but delicate skin
The ozone runs out and the UV gets in.

Above the Antarctic, its texture is weak;
Our firmament's ceiling is springing a leak
And fluorocarbons (I cannot tell why)
Are somehow enlarging the hole in the sky.

If there be a god who is watching our race
From somewhere in extra-terrestrial space,
Observing our human activities through
The canopied roof of celestial blue,

It might be as well to ensure that our skies
Envelope mankind, with our sins and our lies
Completely concealed by a sky without holes.
We then might pretend we've respectable souls.

The civilized nations should urgently try
To patch up the holes in our communal sky.

* * *

RELIGION

Our Family Story ver720.mym

My mother was a virgin maid.
She bore me in a shed.
When ox and ass were out to grass,
She lay down there instead.

And people came to visit us
From all round Gallilee.
They brought us gifts, and gave us lifts,
And cared for Mum and me.

With Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and John,
And Ringo, Starr and Paul,
I preached of love, the Lord above,
And brotherhood to all.

I walked on water (more or less);
Did tricks with fish and bread;
Made crippled men to walk again
And raised the living dead.

I took up jobbing carpentry -
A plain but honest trade –
And worked on wood and brotherhood
Until I was betrayed.

The Romans didn't like me, so
They had me crucified,
To turn and toss upon a cross
Till, finally, I died.

In heat and low humidity,
I soon gave up the ghost –
Though Goodness knows just when I rose
To join the heavenly host.

There isn't much to do up here.
It's dull in Kingdom Come.
I joined the choir and, rising higher,
I waited here for Mum.

And now we rule Eternity,
Each on a golden throne.
Papa has one, and so has Mum,
And I sit on my own.

Now all you worldy virgin maids,
Take heed of what I say:
You, too, may rise to Paradise
If you behave O.K.

And if at first you don't conceive,
Stay true to what you are.
Don't mope or bitch, but simply hitch
Your wagon to a Star;

But don't just trust to Providence
In this great world of sin.
Before you're due, make sure that you
Book early at the Inn.

* * *

The three wise men and the shepherds ver742.sta

A star arose from out the east
(As anyone could have guessed,
For nothing - to my ken, at least –
Arises in the West.)

A fellow from the D.O.D.
First shouted "Look out, Bud!
It's from the Middle East, you see,
So maybe it's a SCUD."

A NASA chap, who tried to gauge
Its speed and its position,
Declared it was a second stage
From some APOLLO mission.

The third, in oceanography,
Marched to another drumming,
Predicting that it probably
Foretold El Nine's coming.

The Jewish shepherds, from afar,
Observed those three wise men,
And chose to wait until that star
Should come around again.

* * *

On Christmas morrow ver860.thr

(Basses) The three great kings rose early at the inn
Where they had occupied the royal suites
With modern plumbing, sheets of damascene,
And views of distant hills. On dusty streets
In gilded carriages they travelled home
To stately palace and to pleasure dome.

(Chorus) Lose no lambs and lose no sleep.
We'll stay home to watch our sheep.

(Tenors) The three wise men rose later from their beds
In lower, cheaper rooms without a view
(Though they had made their bookings well ahead,
For, being wise, they knew a thing or two)
And they returned to homes in distant parts
For contemplation, science and the arts.

(Chorus) Lose no lambs and lose no sleep.
We'll stay home to watch our sheep.

(Counter-tenors) The three poor shepherds huddled in their tents
Beneath rough coverlets of wool or fur.
They'd brought no cash to pay the hostel rent,
Nor gold or silver, frankincense or myrrh.
After a night of cold and troubled sleep
They trudged back to their untended sheep.

(Chorus) Lose no lambs and lose no sleep.
We'll stay home to watch our sheep.

(Counter-tenors again) They found their flocks had scattered far and wide
Across the pastures of that wild terrein
Of valley, rock and rugged mountain-side.
It took a day to round them up again.
They said "When next an angel comes with news
Of virgin birth and shining eastern star –
Another infant monarch of the Jews -
We'll stay and watch our flocks, just where we are.

(Chorus) Lose no lambs and lose no sleep.
We'll stay home to watch our sheep."
* * *

Mary Magdalen ver866.peo

People wonder, now and then:
Who was Mary Magdalen?

Truly, Jesus loved her best.
She was good, and heaven-blessed.
Mary loved Him: she believed,
And, in course of time, conceived.

After He was crucified,
Mary wandered far and wide;
Carrying his unborn child,
She was spurned, in shame reviled.

Finally, she had to flee
From her home in Galilee,
Sorrowfully setting sail
On the seas, through calm and gale,
Till, by tempest and by chance,
Mary reached the coast of France.

Amid sturdy Roman stock
In the land of Langue d'Oc,
Mary bore her child of shame,
Lacking father, lacking name.

In far lands she sowed the seed
Of the early Christian creed.
Preaching, of her own accord,
Faith in Jesus Christ the Lord.

Those who heard, and sons and daughters,
Multiplied across the waters
And, wherever Mary went,
Rose a Christian settlement.

* * *

What blew away? ver743.mar

Martin wrote a hundred theses
(Some suspected even more):
Pinned them up, like press releases,
To a Wittenberger door.
To the chancel's wooden portal
He attached his grave dissent –
But his pens were old and mortal;
Some were rusted, blunt or bent;
Some were pressed on metal pieces,
Turned aside by nail or knot.
Of those hundred learned pieces
Ninety-five is all we got.

* * *

Eppure si muove! ver759.moo

The Moon goes round the Earth, as we
Have known since dim antiquity,
Though, when each moonlit night was done,
They used to think the golden sun,
Resplendent in his fiery flame,
Went round our planet much the same.
We now are certain that they erred:
Geocentricity's absurd.

When Galileo pointed out
That things went other-ways about,
The Pope (Christ's vicar here on Earth
Who could not question virgin birth)
Denied, by Vatican decree,
Such heliocentricity,
Asserting Earth goes round the Sun
Was mortal heresy, that none
Should ever contemplate if he
Aspired to Christianity.

But that was all three centuries
And fifty years ago. Decrees
Proclaiming that the Sun goes round
Are now accepted as unsound.

As Earth rotates (the Pontiff knows)
Our human population grows.
In feast or famine, war or peace,
The peoples of the World increase,
And every time the World turns round
More food and shelter must be found.
A hundred thousand more each day
Need housing, sustenance and pay –
A hundred thousand mortals more
Than lived on Earth the day before.

Mankind has bred himself to dearth
And hunger spreads about the Earth.
Our populations, uncontrolled,
Grow daily denser than of old:
Our overcrowded slums expand
And famine stalks across the land.

Yet, after but a few more years
Of papal doctrines in arrears,
Another pope, as yet unborn,
Discarding principles outworn,
Must recognize that, far too long,
Such papal doctrines have been wrong.

Both pope and peasant have to see
That breeding exponentially
Makes bigger problems than before
And leads to famine and to war.
Our families must now be planned
In every state of every land.

A future pope, more wise, less blind
To destitution of mankind,
For our salvation, by God's will,
Should bless the condom and the pill.

* * *

The Relics ver713.iha

I have seen relics, claimed among the best
In fine cathedrals, but am unimpressed.
My faith is in the spirit of the Cross.
I scorn or smile at claims of holy dross.

Those many shards of the "true cross", combined,
Could serve to build a chapel that enshrined
Ten full-size crosses. What could scholars do
To sort false wooden slivers from the true?

Those reddened bones were of Cro-Magnon men
(Not holy saints, who lived to live again),
Now disinterred - from well before the flood –
Still stained with ochre, but not holy blood.

This little vial of blood, encased in gold,
Boils briefly - though, they say, remaining cold
At sunrise on St Athanasus1 Day –
Yet nonetheless it never boils away!

This cannot be a crucifixion nail.
Its like, and other rusty relics, fail
In chemical analyses; defined,
Their elements prove of a recent kind.

How many foreskins - shriveled, dusty, dry -
Are cached away in vault and sacristy?
Who now can claim, if any, which of them
Had been cut off in ancient Bethlehem?

Temples and mosques and synagogues are proud
Possessors of such scraps in foreign lands,
Though few can rival that disputed shroud
Enshrined in glass, away from human hands,

Displayed in a cathedral in Turin
(In cabinets along with other junk)
Imprinted, with false wounds on human skin,
By cunning bishop, or deceiving monk.

Sri Lanka boasts a sacred Buddha's tooth
With only scant similitude of truth;
While holy relics, stone or bone or gem,
Are everywhere in old Jerusalem.

Relics, they claim? Such fragments merely prove
That man's credulity exceeds true love.
Surely, if we have faith, and it is good,
We have no need for little bits of wood.

* * *

Prior to John was a Richard, a Tom
(Gylys) and Roxton and Marshall.
Prior to them there were Roger and John,
Two honest Willies, who followed upon
Simon of Eaton and Geoff de Barton.
Prior to him was Richard de Marins
(Maybe a sailor, back home from his sins).

The first that we know of was pious old Bern-
ard, who founded the church, before Cuthbert in turn
And Thomas the first, who had only one name:
(We haven't a clue from which village he came;
The records were lost in some chancery fires.)
These, then, were the first of our Dunstable priors.

* * *

Parable ver228.the

There was a man who had four sons
(It's funny how they come in runs}
And, finally, a daughter.
On sweet and bitter herbs they fed
With leavened and unleavened bread,
Boiled eggs and salted water.

The first was wise and most devout.
He knew the Talmud inside out,
And quoted line and verse.
The second was a naughty lad
Who started out by being bad
And went from bad to worse.

The third son's head was solid bone.
He never could be left alone
To do the simplest task;
While number four, with vacant stare,
Accepted life without a care,
Without the sense to ask.

(The girl? O, yes; we quite forgot.
The daughter that the man begot
Was feminine, and thus
Was sometimes wise, and sometimes wild,
And sometimes stupid as a child,
But always curious.)

* * *

On making a new garden ver670.cor

The corner where an urban fox
Once lived among discarded pots
Is redesigned for hollyhocks
And semi-wild forget-me-nots.
So we have made a pile of rocks
Beside the lawn that we shall mow,
And saxifrage will vie with phlox
Where now the blooming thistles grow.

The broken china and the stones
Accrue in rough, untidy piles
Along with long-eroded bones -
But where should we put shattered tiles?
(I asked them at the Tuileries,
And sought advice on Tegelbakken:
Should we dispose of them at sea
Or bury them among the bracken?)

The virtuous to Heaven rise,
And simpletons go there as well.
Small children play in Paradise
While mortal sinners roast in Hell.
When, daily, God assigns the dead
(According to St Peter's files)
To compost heap or flower-bed,
What happens to us broken tiles?

* * *

Excuse me! Ver970.whe

Whenever I'm away from home,
On business or for play,
There's always someone stopping me
And asking me the way.
So, when I go to Paradise,
I'll find it rather odd
If some lost souls don't speak to me
And ask the way to God.

* * *

POLITICS

Reflections on a Wall in Arlington ver722.thi

This is not a wailing wall.
Under it there lie no bones.

Speaking, if they speak at all,
Softly, and in measured tones,
Visitors who come and go
Pause a while to read a name –
One of thousands, row on row,
Scored in tragedy and fame.

On its surface, polished jet,
Lists of soldiers crowd its side.
Many would be with us yet
Had they not in duty died.

(Should there be another wall
Naming men as good as these,
Ten times longer, twice as tall,
Listing fallen Vietnamese?)

Cut in marble, hard and black,
Dead men are beyond recall.
Is there need for looking back?
Let this be our final wall!

* * *

Dangerous Dan ver706.sta

The stars that shone in the night had gone.
The sky had begun to pale,
And over the hills came riding, riding
Dangerous Dan McQuayle.

He headed south to a distant sea
As the sun rose on his right.
It wasn't so bright - but then, nor was he
On that dim historic night.

He thought of all he had learned at Yale
And all that he nearly knew.
His battle-cry was "A-Quayle! A-Quayle!",
And his eyes shone steely blue.

He headed his horse to a distant shore
(Wherever he had in mind).
He rode as nobody rode before,
And he pointed his guns behind.

"I go; I see; I shall win!" he cried;
"Amo, and amas, amat";
And the Latin leaders all quailed inside:
They knew what he meant by that.

From out of the distant hills they rode
Along paths that were rough and steep,
Each leaving his humble adobe abode
To meet with the Great White Veep.

They came by night and they came by day
From arroyo and gulch and gorge,
And everyone fell on his knees to pray
For country, and Yale, and George.

* * *

We and they ver867.wed

We drive to work; we drive to play.
Their industries foul air and sea.
Our skies grow darker day by day
But who are we, and who are they?

They fell the forests, tree by tree,
To grow bananas, cane or hay -
But we like sugar in our tea,
So who are we, and who are they?

We saw them take the Jews away,
Condemned by Nuremberg decree.
The train-loads passed us every day -
But who are we, and who are they?
They flew our 'planes across the sea;
Our taxes went to pay their way
We bombed their towns to set them free
Yet who are we, and who are they?

* * *

The younger scholars of our land
Had carried flags in either hand.
They gave us rice and cups of tea,
And shouted for democracy.

They stubbornly refused to go,
But they had only stones to throw.
Our army of the P.R.C.
Could overcome them easily.

So, on the second day of June,
We showed them they were not immune.
We overcame our "enemy" -
The student sons of Comrade Li.

We drove them from Tien An Men Square:
They had no right to protest there.
We had to let them know that we
Outranked their university.

On orders from Supreme Command –
The highest leaders of our land -
With tanks and with artillery
We doused the lights of liberty.

(When blood can be so lightly shed,
Then China's dignity is dead,
For all the watching World could see
Our brutal, pyrrhic victory.)

* * *

I.R.A. ver695.ikn

I know a bank where the wild thyme grows,
Where savings grow in the I.R.A.
To pay for the cargoes that, no-one knows,
Are shipped to the bombers in Belfast Bay.

The terrorist Irish will have their day:
The shame of the shamrock is under the rose,
Supported in part by the I.R.A.
Accrued in the banks where the wild thyme grows,

* * *

Parading to another drum,
To traffic horns or village bands,
They marched to war, and Kingdom Come,
On beaches in foreign lands.

The Canterbury bells still ring
Around another village green.
For shillings, country, God and king,
The martial drums still beat unseen

As we prepare for global war
With electronic buttoning –
Though nothing is worth dying for
If not a bird be left to sing.

When uniforms are burned away
And not a drum is left to boom,
No glory will remain that day
But uniformity of doom.

* * *

SONGS

Song: England in the Nineties ver797.lan

Land of hope unfounded
For the almost free.
Land of strikes unbounded
And redundancy.
Of they wide dominions
One by one bereft.
Of thy far-flung empire
There is little left.

Falklands still retaining;
Hongkong almost gone:
Now it's mostly raining
Where the sun once shone.

Rockall is remaining
And the Isle of Man,
Britons, uncomplaining,
Do the best we can.

* * *

Hymn for the Circumcision

His lady mother was intact
Until she bore her Son,
And so was Jesus Christ, in fact,
Until this deed was done.

But what the eastern star portends
God's stern decrees fulfill –
A destiny that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.

He had to meet the Reaper grim,
But we have put aside
That little holy peace of Him
That was not crucified.

* * *

It came upon a midnight clear
As we were eating chips
And swilling soda-pop or beer -
A total moon eclipse.
For half an hour or thereabout
The shadow of our earth
Obscured the moon: we blacked it out
By magnitude of girth.

Three wise guys, who sat round with us
And shared our chips and beers,
Foretold events analogous
Maybe in two more years;
For as the moon goes round the earth,
The earth goes round the sun.
(They had no faith in virgin birth
Or three-combined-as-one.)

It came upon a time foretold
In records of mankind
But, as our daily lives unfold,
Eclipses slip the mind.
Yet all the vaulted heavens vast
Conform to certain plans:
Eclipses come, as in the past,
Indifferent to man's.)

* * *

This long and costly dress
Was tailored to impress.
It's cut so low, it aims to show
My bosom, more or less.

This undervest or slip
Extends from chest to hip.
It, half-opaque, conceals my shape
Till finally I strip.

I generally wear
A padded brassiere.
I look my best (when half-undressed)
Supported here and there.

These nylon panty-hose
Are needed, goodness knows,
When all else fails in winter gales
Or when an updraft blows.

When all these clothes have gone,
I must depend upon
My modest sense of reticence.
And keep my panties on.

* * *

McApple ver724.ona

On a desk in my office there stands a machine -
It's an Apple, McApple, McApple –
Where for ages my files and my notebooks had been
Before Apple, McApple, McApple.
I store all my data, both verbal and fisc-
al in some sort of order on some kind of disc,
And I keep them for ever, with minimal risk,
In my Apple, McApple, McApple.

I haven't the slightest idea how it works -
My good Apple, McApple, McApple –
There must be a genie or something that lurks
In my Apple, McApple, McApple –
I don't have to do any sums any more
(To calculate means was a bit of a bore);
I just crunch all my numbers and put them in store
In my Apple, McApple, McApple.

I've choices of layouts and spacing display
In my Apple, McApple, McApple.
I punch in a programme, and something obeys
In my Apple, McApple, McApple.
When processing words it's much faster than type,
So I strike when I wish while the apple is ripe,
And whatever goes wrong I can instantly wipe
From my Apple, McApple, McApple.

It's easy to enter, to store and retrieve
From my Apple, McApple, McApple,
And so I give thanks to old Adam and Eve
And their apple, McApple, McApple.
I love apparatus, authentic or clone,
So to contact my office, just pick up a 'phone
And record what you wish at the sound of the tone
By my Apple, McApple, McApple.

I tap data-bases whenever I wish
With my Apple, McApple, McApple,
Through some sort of cable, antenna or dish
Tuned to Apple, McApple, McApple.
My incoming mail is accruing in stacks,
But in answering letters I'm terribly lax
Since beside my computer there's also a FAX
By my Apple, McApple, McApple.

My business computer is golden and chrome –
Polished Apple, McApple, McApple.
Another computer's installed in my home –
Also Apple, McApple, McApple.
I'm not going into the office today:
The students have gone, and the Chairman's away.
I'll just put on some records, drink coffee, and play
With my Apple, McApple, McApple.

In the fullness of time, when our children have grown –
Singing Apple, McApple, McApple –
Our daughters and sons will have kits of their own
Like my Apple, McApple, McApple.
Of tasks for computers there's never a dearth
In sickness and health, and in sorrow and mirth,
And the seeds of McApp 'll inherit the earth.

(For the last line, just hum the tune)

* * *

The gilded cage (last verse) ver818.yea

The years have rolled by
Like the wink of an eye
Since her husband has passed away,
And the middle-aged bitch
Has become very rich
And her life-style is fast and gay.
What she now can afford
Is its own reward
On society's worldly stage,
And there's much to be said,
If you're rich and well-fed,
For a life in a gilded cage.

* * *

Single gels/ single gels ver694.whe

1. When you haven't got
Better things to do,
Stir the Yuletide pot, and
Add Coomassie Blue.
Supersonic sounds
Vie with Christmas bells.
Sing the carol rounds, and
Rock around the gels.

O- Single gels, single gels,
Single all the way.
O what fun
It is to run
A 1-strand DNA - hey!
Single gels, single gels,
Single all the way.
0 what fun
It is to run
A 1-strand DNA.

2. We don't want no snow.
We don't have no chains.
We prefer the glow
Of fluorescent stains.
As the Christmas bells
To the welkin ring,
Rocking little gels
Rock around till spring.

O - Single gels, single gels,
Single all the way.
O what fun
It is to run
A 1-strand DNA - hey!
Single gels, single gels,
Single all the way,
O, what fun It is to run
A single-handed,
Double-stranded, triple-banded
Plasmid DNA.

(Here we go a sequencing
among the Southern blots . . .
* * *

Good King Wenceslas stepped out
On to something squishy,
And the air all round about
Started smelling fishy.

"Hither, page, and bring me scoop
With some sort of scraper,
For, to clear this canine poop,
We'll need more than paper."

In his master's steps he trod
On the path of virtue,
Thinking that such fecal sod
Surely cannot hurt you.

Page and monarch plodded on,
Fecal smells defying,
And the stuff they'd stepped upon
Took a long time drying

* * *

Addendum to Lord Mountararat's Song ver804.tho

Though now the British Commonwealth
Perceptibly declines
(By force of arms or just decrees)
And o'er our final colonies
The sun too rarely shines,

Yet here and there, around the world,
The British flag still flies unfurled,

And we prevail in other way
In Beth-the-second's glorious (?) days.

* * *

The "Sohgen-maru" Shanty ver783.wec

We came for research on the "Sohgen-maru" -
"Sohgen-maru", "Sohgen-maru" –
But when we arrived we had hardly a clue
On the "Sohgen-maru".

We thought we'd have little or nothing to do -
Nothing to do, nothing to do –
So planned to relax while admiring the view
From the "Sohgen-maru".

In fact, we worked more than we usually do -
Usually do, usually do –
And hadn't much time for just watching the view
From the "Sohgen-maru".

We swam and we dived in the ocean so blue -
Ocean so blue, ocean so blue –
We saw many fishes - and ate quite a few
On the "Sohgen-maru".

We love our dear Captain and all of his crew –
All of his crew, all of his crew -
And the dinners were almost too good to be true
On the "Sohgen-maru"

Now maybe our work will reveal something new –
Reveal something new, reveal something new -
For who can fortell what results might ensure
From the "Sohgen-maru"?

We'll just have to wait till our data accrue -
Data accrue, data accrue –
Invoke Lady Luck, and give devils their due
From the "Sohgen-maru".

* * *

Get me to the Schul on time ver664.1et

Let's all cast our bread upon the waters:
Pitch our petty evils to the tide:
Strike out rotten luckies
And throw them to the duckies
As you doven on the shore outside.

Cast your sorry sins upon the ocean:
Throw out as many as you please:
Tie them into bunches
To make sin-and-sandwich lunches
And dump them on the wide-dark seas.

Pity all the seagulls in the morning,
Each with a gizzard full of sin.
There'll be little question
They may die of indigestion;
Then we'll notify the next of kin.

Cast your crumby croutons on the ocean
Down beside the shadow of the pier.
The crusts go drifting so far,
So blow on the old Shofar,
And herald in the Brave New Year.

* * *

Song: Palestine in the Nineties ver798.ify

If you go down Gaza way,
Any time of any day,
You can find them all
Doing the Gaza Walk - oy!
Every little girl or boy –
Gaza Jew or Gaza Goy –
You'll find them all
Doing the Gaza Walk.

Nobody wants to go there;
Public morale is low there
Nobody wants to stay there,
Play there, pray there.

Breaking windows, breaking peace;
Pitching stones at the police –
You can find them all
Doing the Gaza Walk.

Nobody loves his neighbour.
Nobody wants to labour.
Everyone's trained for hating –
Hate unabating.

All are steeped in racial strife
Armed with stone or stick or knife:
That's the daily Gaza Way –
Doing the Gaza Walk.

* * *

Ron the President looked out
O'er his noble nation,
Seeing Commies all about
Deep in conspiration.

Ronald Reagan then called forth
From his office casement:
"Bring me Colonel Ollie North
From the White House basement."

"Hither, Ollie, stand by me.
In our new incursions,
We must surreptitiously
Help the honest Persians."

"Let us sell them bombs, perhaps,
In some secret sessions,
But don't let the other chaps
Know of our transgressions."

"Sorry, Ronnie" Ollie said,
With a tremor tearful,
"Though one's better dead than red,
I'm a trifle fearful."

"Fear not, Ollie" Ron replied,
"History has shown us –
Helping wars, on either side,
Brings a massive bonus."

"Sell them guns and planes and stuff,
Even if out-dated.
If we only sell enough,
They'll be extirpated."

"OK, Ronnie" North agreed,
"Though we may regret it,
I'll arrange the dirty deed.
You can just forget it."

Therefore, Christians, be like North:
Keep the nations guessing.
Take the Fifth, while looking forth
With your boss's blessing.

Aria from "Zuzamenhofmeistersinger" (an opera mercifully in no acts at all)

0ver823.all

All substantives must end in o –
That's just the way they have to go –
And adjectives must end in a
For that's the good and proper way.
Yes, all nouns end in o - oh!
All nouns end in o.

Imperatives must end in_u
To tell us what one has to do.
Infinitives must end in i
(I'm not exactly certain why)
And all nouns end in o - oh
All nouns end in o.

All adverbs have to end in e
By formal Zamenhof decree,
And present tenses end in as –
So peace and joy to all of us –
And now it's time to go - so
It's time for us to go.

* * *

MISCELLANEOUS

Water, water ver786.fro

From a boggy seep or spring,
Flowing, or just trickling
From a hillside, wetly gleaming,
Through the open pastures streaming,
Tumbling from grey mountain ledges
Down to land's emergent edges
Where the seas endure our shipping,
Sailing, surfing, skinny-dipping.

Pure, polluted, salt or sweet,
Churning down a flooded street
As a devastating flood,
Swift as horses, thick as mud.
Winter snow and hotspring steam;
Ripples on a woodland stream;
Tempest clouds -

When torn asunder,
Water has the voice of thunder.

Drainage channels, dark and deep;
Drenching horses; dipping sheep;
Coffee, cocoa, tea and pop;
Tankard brimming to the top;
Raindrop, river, ocean tide –
All are water modified.

Faucets dripping, kettles hissing –
Water sounds are soft as kissing.

* * *

The Book ver652.wec

We come from halls of Academe
And, on an inspiration.
Alone, or in a learned team.
Embark on publication.

We seek to teach, or disabuse.
Where controversy rages.
And press our honest facts, or views,
On academic pages.

Then, if our theories endure,
Maintained by erudition,
Our luck and virtue should assure
A third or fourth edition.

For ultimately all should know
The fruits of our endeavour.
Though scholars come and scholars go.
Our books go on for ever.

* * *

Pennies ver721.weu

We used to live in London Town,
In a suburban neighbourhood.
(Our house is gone: they tore it down,
And shops were built where once it stood.)

But long ago, along our street,
An organ-grinder, old and lame,
Would often play, with wavering beat,
Uncertain tunes without a name.

We sometimes gave him pennies, which
We slipped into his slotted box
In hopes that he would move his pitch
To further streets on other blocks.

We paid him off - that is to say,
Encouraged him to go away.

My course on Archaeography
Is now a repetitious song,
And so my university
Is urging me to move along.

Now greyest-haired of all my peers,
My tenured time is almost through,
And I, who lectured here for years,
Have little left to say or do.

My academic course is run:
I have no newer songs to sing,
So they extend, for duties done,
A golden handshake, offering

A thousand, thousand pennies.

That is not to be sniffed lightly at..

* * *

Others ver766.myf

My family members are dear to my heart:
I cherish my father and mother.
But nearer than these, in a class that's apart,
I love my Significant Other.

Some fifty per-cent of the genes we express
We share with our sisters and brothers;
But when we are troubled, in doubt or distress,
We turn to Significant Others.

I honour the flag and the land of my birth
(Though one is as good as another),
But none has for me the equivalent worth
Of my Highly Significant Other.

* * *

The Ring of Truth ver683.itw

It was the time for breakfasting, at seven (more or less).
The kindly Queen had gone upstairs to waken the Princess.
That damsel lay fast asleep beneath her counterpane,
And, close beside her, sleeping still, there lay a handsome swain.
"Good gracious me!" exclaimed the Queen, "Now, who on earth is he?
A stranger in my daughter's bed defies propriety."
The maiden wakened at the sound and, with a sleepy sigh,
She propped up on one elbow and she offered this reply.

"You know that ring I got last year, when I turned seventeen.
I lost it only yesterday, while walking by the green.
I'd stopped to watch the swallows and the clouds that sailed beyond
And, as I turned the pretty ring, I dropped it in the pond.
I searched for it among the reeds along the muddy side,
But couldn't find it there at all, so I sat down and cried.
But, as I wept, a warty toad came up and asked me why
I sat, disconsolate and sad. He winked an opal eye.
I told him I had lost my ring beyond the bank of reed,
And begged his help to look for it - and, kindly, he agreed,
But asked that, in return, I'd let him spend the night with me.
Since I am not averse to toads, I said that I'd agree.
He dove in, and he found the ring in just a little while,
And brought it up, and gave it me with such a friendly smile.
I took him into bed last night, as soon as it was warmed,
But, by the early morning light, I saw that toad transformed
Into the fair and charming prince who now beside me lies.
This was, of course, O mother dear, an unforeseen surprise."

The Queen, initially nonplussed in regal consternation
Regained her calm composure and reviewed this explanation.
Her mind went back to long ago, before she was a queen
When suitors came a-courting her, and she was seventeen.
"I fully understand" she said, with equanimity.
"I'll ask the staff to send you up a second cup of tea."

* * *

The winnowing fan ver731.blo

The blower stands upon the threshing floor,
Unlike the baskets that we tossed of yore.
Its fan is cranked by hand - by mortal art
Creating winds that winnow chaff apart.
We turn the handle steadily, with ease,
Without the need to wait for nature's breeze.
By human labour, cunningly applied,
Good grain falls clean, while husks are blown aside,

* * *

Above a country churchyard ver703.awa

Away from fields, secure from mortal toil,
Immune to death-watch, damages and damp,
Anointed with our love and linseed oil,
They stand, like sentinels, upon a ramp.

When daylight shortens, as perforce it must,
While hour-bells chime, and every second ticks,
We keep them dry, like sermons in the dust:
Six months they're in, and then they're out for six.

We do not cast them in a dungeon vile:
The helves would warp, the wood would tend to crack.
We store them in the church, to keep in style;
Then, when sweet Spring returns, we take them back.

And when the furtive cricket, in the gloam,
Chirrups to hoppers in the Autumn meads,
It calls, concealed beneath the hearth and home,
To cousins out among the boundary reeds.

Chains may fall silent, yet the rafters ring
Above the roofs where nightly stalk the cats
(Old Tom sings out, with Tabby answering)
In Winter belfries with our Summer bats.

* * *

Neighbours ver842.mil

Millie and Jennie have flowery dresses.
Sometimes they visit for watching TV.
Ma wears white blouses which grandmother presses.
We lend them sugar, and they give us tea.

Otherside neighbours must work in the city.
They're very friendly, although they are white.
Driving for hours is a terrible pity:
Off in the mornings, and back late at night.

Over the railway the people are quiet.
Chinese, we think, with just two or three boys,
Living on rice and some strange foreign diet.
I've never noticed them playing with toys.

Sometimes a mocking-bird sings in the blossoms
Down by the wall, where the shrubbery ends.
Back of our house there are robins and 'possums:
These are just some of our neighbourhood friends,

* * *

My muse ver807.myk

My keyboard's plus or minus sign
Can serve for simple sums,
But there's no micron sign on mine:
I have to type them urn's.
But when I publish SEMs or TEMs,
Maybe in years to come,
I plan to use a proper mu
Instead of printing urn.

* * *

Although the ground seems barren,
Here and there, at odd times
New ideas arise,
Soaking through the dry surface,
And ultimately joining
An aquifer of subconsciousness.

Sometimes, somehow,
They break through the dusty surface
As freshets,
Trickling out to join others
In a stream of consciousness,
Finally washing into a lake
Of useful knowledge.

At other times a drought returns.
Ideas dry up, rising like steam
To join Empyrean clouds;
And yet later, like rain,
They may trickle down again
Elsewhere, on other patches
Of seemingly barren soil.

* * *

Untitled ver679.non

None but the fair deserve the brave
To relish the air at Finegal's Cave.
Ladies in mufti may eat their cake,
For anything goes down at Finegal's Wake.
Many a slip, between lips and toes,
Covers a torso, bare and free.
Many a casement, goodness knows,
Opens to face adversity.

Hasten the day when sets the sun
Out of the dusk to endless night,
Washed by the tides that, one by one,
Glint in the gold of the evening light.
Perish the thought - if thought there be,
Deeper than anyone's six-foot grave.
Out of the mist, it seems to me,
Only the fair deserve the brave.

* * *

Surfers ver910.weh

We hail those fearless, lissome student braves -
The sable-suited surfers of the seas –
Who ride the polystyrene o'r the waves,
Undaunted by chill 55 degrees.

Stout-hearted, nimble-footed, on their steeds
They skim on boards beyond the zone of weeds
>From early morning light. They swim and ride
And swim again into the ebbing tide;
Then, with untiring vigour, mount once more
The cresting waves that course towards the shore.

Returning to their cars, they leave the tide,
Take off sea-dripping suits and, having dried,
Retrieve their hidden keys, to drive away
And face the courses of the Scholars' Way
In classes of the university -

Computer science, or biology -
With challenges that exercise the mind
As daunting as the seas they leave behind.

* * *

Alphabet ver778.ais

- for the children of Singapore

A is for ants, which can run round for hours
B is for butterflies visiting flowers
C is for cakes, which we all like to eat
D is for durian, smelly but sweet
E is for eagle that sits in a tree
F is for fishes that swim in the sea
G is for gecko that runs on the wall
H is for hats that we hang in the^all
I is for iron, for pressing a dress
J is for jam (but let's not make a mess!)
K is for kelongs, where people catch fish
L is for licheees with ice in a dish
M is for mynah-bird: see how he hops!
N is for noodles from neighbourhood shops
O is for orange, which give us sweet juices
P is for pins, which can have many uses
Q is for queen with a silvery crown
R is for rambutans, reddish or brown
S is for slippers we put by our bed,
T is for teapot, and turtle, and thread.
U's for umbrella, to keep off the showers
V's for Miss Vanda, our national flowers.
W's for water, on which a cork floats.
X is for xylophone's musical notes.
Y is for yoghurt, a favourite food, and
Z is for zoo, where we go when we're good.

* * *

The magnet in the soap ver67l.mag

Why do we watch these dramas of the tube?
We want to see how simple people cope
With puzzles intricate as Rubik's cube
(The magnet half-embedded in the soap.)

What holds us to the little silver screen,
In bondage by some unseen silken rope?
We see ourselves as we just might have been
(The magnet half-embedded in the soap.)

These chocolate soldiers battle after eight,
Their leisure laced with alcohol and dope.
We gaze, entranced, to learn their awful fate
(The magnet half-embedded in the soap.)

Someone must win, when pushing comes to shove.
In spite of desperation, there is hope.
In spite of lust, there grows a little love
(The magnet half-embedded in the soap.)

The actors charm us for an hour or two:
They curse and wheedle, strut and fume and mope,
We stay to see what fickle Fate will do
The magnet half-embedded in the soap.)

We know the obstacles the actors face
In tropic jungle or on icy slope.
We dread the arsenic; we love the lace
(Twin magnets, half-embedded in the soap.)

Some fall in love, or from a craggy cliff.
Some kill, seduce, get married or elope
In mirrored life, and still we wonder if
There's magnetism in that piece of soap.

And so we face a nightly paradox,
Portrayed in our inverted telescope,
Escaping, yet glued firmly to the box
Like magnets, half-embedded in the soap.

* * *

Black knight ver888.bla

Black knight, black knight – the blackest night of all,
That follows pride and summer in the fall
The right-hand spring that strains, in summer rain,
The Spanish dancer on the Spanish Main.
What spring shall now befall: What tale foretell
As curlews mew and tolls the village bell?
The prince of darkness fades before the dawn
E'er daffodils display across the lawn
Keep right, young man, and let who will be left –
Of mind bewitched, of other sense bereft.
The crack of dawn begins the morning sounds
And Mike the Milkman runs his daily rounds.

* * *

The crane operator ver808.fro

From the Arctic seas to the southern capes,
There's ships that come in a range of shapes:

There's ocean liners and private yachts –
From giant tankers to tiny tots -
And they're all afloat on the wine-dark seas
All round 360 degrees.

They go to and fro', they go round and round,
But almost none can go up and down.

Now I'm the driver of an ocean crane
That takes boats up and then down again.

I lift them out of the ocean deep
To the boat deck, where they can go to sleep -

Where each of their cradles has been designed
For a size and shape of a special kind.

The Avons and Wellands are put to rest
In just the positions that suit them best,

And I'm the fellow that works the crane
That puts them back on the sea again.

* * *

People, too, of whatever worth,
Walk around on the face of the earth,

But everybody - sooner or later -
Is moved, up or down, by some Operator.

* * *

In realms of cloud the water lives.
It falls to earth as rain or snow,
And where the soil is wet, it gives
New life that stirs pine-seeds to grow.

The saplings rise to noble trees
That raise their branches ever higher
Until we bring them to their knees
And cut the wood to make our fire.

It warms us in the winter's cold
And dries away the chilly rain.
With yellow flames, like flowers of gold,
Smoke rises to the clouds again.

* * *

Interval at the RSC Theatre ver956.wel

We leave our seats in gallery or stall
And, in a 30-minute interval,
We seek a place among the serried ranks
Of visitors along sweet Avon's banks,
In need of sunshine - and a pause of peace –
Beside the river and the gliding geese,
While, barely rippled, Avon, flowing on
Reflects the snowy image of a swan.

How dignified and noble is the bird
Compared to Richard (House of York) the Third!

And then, once more, the vaulted hall is packed
As we, enthralled, await the second act.

* * *

Mirror, mirror ver856.mir

“Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is fairest of us all?”

It replied; “On due reflection,
I don’t like your dark complexion”
Showing its dissatisfaction
With affirmative reaction.
(There’s no countenancing this
Kind of racial prejudice.)

“Mirror, let me tell you why
I’m so dark. It’s just that I,
On a beach beside the ocean,
Failed to use my sunburn lotion.
Please consider this; it means
I’ve no darkness in my genes.”

Faced with this disarming fact,
Penitent, the mirror cracked.

* * *

Horseshoes ver1025.myg

My grandfather lived as a worthy smith;
He worked by the sweat of his brow.
He could weld and anneal
And could temper fine steel -
But very few horseshoes are needed now.

My grandfather's dead. Where his forge once stood
A garage extends there now,
Where horseshoes were made
In his ancient trade -
But hardly anyone buys them now.

My grandfather lived in the village square
By the side of the "Spotted Cow",
Forging horseshoes with care
In the hot, smoky air -
But there's hardly a customer needs them now.

Old horseshoes are thrown in the annual fair
To catch on a post somehow.
Or nailed on a door –
Though who knows what for?
And almost nobody buys them now.

* * *

The Redundant Blacksmith ver911.the

The forge is cold where now, forlorn,
The village smith still stands,
Time hanging heavy on his brow
And on his idle hands
For not a horse is left to shoe
In all the village lands.

Where once he forged an iron plough,
And horseshoes, and a goad,
A filling station occupies
His place along the road,
Where laden lorries rumble past
His humble old abode.

Where once we saw the silver sparks
And heard the anvil ring,
And through the village we could hear
The sounds of hammering,
His hearty voice is heard no more-
He has no heart to sing.

* * *

Nancy, Raisa and me ver647.inr

In ranking societies, 1 up to 10,
There's none that's as nice as the W.S.N.
The U.S. is larger and richer by far -
And so, I suppose, is the U.S.S.R.
They've each got a titular head of the house,
And each of these heads has a titular spouse.
So, up with the star at the top of the tree,
There's Nancy, Raisa, and - finally - me.

Though their homes may be finer, their dresses more fancy,
I sure wouldn't swap with Raisa or Nancy.

* * *

As bearded as his visage on ye coign,
Kyng Alfred, burner of ye bannock cake,
Seeks vertu as he seeks ye Holy Groin
And honour for ye Lady of ye Lake
In deeds of valour, chivalry and fame,
Of dragouns slayn, and ravished mayds unbound,
All vested in ye glory of ye name
And orotundies of ye Table Round
Where, with his following of merrie knights,
In memorys of sultry summer days,
He strives to set ye mortal world to rights
By Louis and ye sun-god's golden rays,
In challenge by a glove, or by a glance,
In armour cased, in amity rejoyced,
And in ye lysts, where wimpled maidens dance,
High-coiffed, they battle boldly in ye joist.

Then gravely spake Kyng Alfred from ye lake:
"Who striketh sword while still ye stele is hot
Shall live to bake a bigger, better cake
And spare another knight in Camelot.
In bloodie combatt as in cavalcade
Are earls benighted, lesser kyngs dethroned,
Great barons bartered, congresses delayed,
Yet only Alfred Kyng is precious stoned."
That noble monark of ye wholly great,
Who synged cake and over-mulled ayl,
By grave report, unmindful of dark fate,
O'erslept in contemplating embered grayl.
And yet, ychosen by ye Witan deed,
In Parret Fen, boggd down by Saxon theyns,
Subscribing to ye chronicles of Bede,
Did Wessex overcome ye greater Danes.

Then slowly answerd Alfred from ye grate
"When Guinnesser, my fayr and noble queen,
Returns from where unconquerable fate
Hath taken her, wherever she has been,
Then shall I draw Excalibour from stone
And so, my expiatioun being done,
In, some smal measure, finally atone

For having overdone ye synged scone."
With heavy hand he smote his regal brow
And, with all manner of regretz profound
That he ne paid attentioun enow,
He cast ye charred cookies to ye ground.
To beard ye Spanish lyon of his mayne
And leave his messuage clerely at ye tone
Until a hand, emergent once again,
Appears at dawn when foggs of night have flown.

"One will reply you, sithen and anon,
As soon as mayde or monitour is free:
In fayr Cockayne or farflung Erewhon
Your calls be answerd consequentially."
Then kyngly muttered Alfred from ye stove
"The quality of merci bears no strains.
Ye hand that rocks ye cradel bears ye glove
That only parfait chivalrie attains."
The grapes of wrath go rarely to ye fayr.
Ye suns of yesteryear no longer parch
The pard or lyon in his noisome layr
Beside some Grecian urn or Roman arch.
Ye sands of thyme within ye hourglass fall:
At shrill alarm ye warriour awakes
As, over Nature, hangs a smoky pall
Where hot Electra's lamp hath chard ye cakes.

Ye toast of Trinity, ye sport of Kyngs,
Reduced anon to destiny and rags,
Ye Parliament of Man, ye Thyng of Thyngs,
Outspoke debate beneath ye orange flags.
True to their times and to Prudential trust,
Signed, quarterd, scaled and corruscate in mayl,
Unspotted by oblivioun ne rust,
They vie upon ye Golden Fields of Grayl
In shining armour, nobly helmed and greaved,
With battle-axe and lance, with spear unfurld,
All hermine-trimd, gazetted and green-sleeved,
They go to glory or a better World.
They order tankards at ye Seven Balls,
r regulate ye lysts -to small avayl –
And leave their scabbards silent in ye halls
To hang for aye upon a handy rail.

Ye iron knights adopt ye lyons' share.
Ye castles castle, leaving cheques in pawn,
Whereby ye brave deserve ye paltry fayr
In fields of valour and of golden corn.
Ye plumed helmsman, turning in ye dark,
Directs his craft to ever distant shore
Where bands, that sound at even in ye barque,
Confront ye golden apple-cart and corps.
Beside Old Drury, as by Avon's Will,
Ye river glideth by her own Sweet Nell,
When all those mighty bishops, lying still,
Proclaim ye passing day by tolling bell.
And then ye toll-house cakes and bannocks burn
In contemplating grave affairs of state.
Engaging rings in ebony return,
But none can answer Alfred at ye grate.

* * *

IMPROPRIETIES

Some hotels have walls so thin
You can hear when folks come in.
Couples come and couples go:
Voices high and voices low -

Heavy breathing, bedsprings creaking,
Then I hear a man's voice speaking -

"That's not going to work, I fear.
Try with you on top, my dear."

Heavy breathing, bedsprings creaking,
Then I hear a woman speaking -

"That's not going to work, I fear.
Try with you on top, my dear."

Heavy breathing, bedsprings creaking,
Then again the man's voice speaking -

"That's not going to work, I fear.
Let's try both on top, my dear."

Heavy breathing, bedsprings creaking,
Finally, the woman speaking -

"This is really too much bother.
Next time, let us get another

Bigger suitcase."

* * *

Lieutenant Lee ver609.lie

Lieutenant Lee sits down to pee;
Wears opals in his ear;
And combs his hair from here to there
Instead of there to here.

Good Mrs. Lee sings tenor in
The military bars.
Their son's a nurse and, what is worse,
Their daughter smokes cigars.

There's all degrees of he's and she's
In Mother Nature's range,
And those who disapprove of these
Are manifestly strange.

* * *

To our dear John ver929.ilo

I love our local to-i-let
(convenience or John),
It's urinals so well designed
for being peed upon.

We hear it flushing,
now and then,
Like babbling brook
in leafy glen,

And recognize
its role austere
By redolence
of atmosphere

Let no-one in
our street forget
The noble local
to-i-let.

* * *

One old professor observes another ver735.hel

He loved his wife with a love sincere
Diminishing steadily year by year.

The little children he doted on
Have grown to adulthood, and now are gone.

He cares less now for his family
And courts the impressionable Miss G.

(I know what the fellow intends to do,
For I, at his age, was an old goat, too.)

* * *

Manganese nodules ver962.asc

A Scottish oceanographer who sailed the seven seas
Takes part in expeditions and enjoys the ocean breeze.
He always wears a tartan kilt: the striping on his skirt
Displays the subtle pattern of the strata in the dirt.

He loves the briny ocean, and the distant foreign shores
And analyzes minerals located in his cores.
He publishes extensively in journals here and there
And he's recognized by tartans that he always likes to wear.

He's just a bonny Scotsman with two bachelor degrees,
And a pair of manganodules slung between his manganese.

* * *

The Human Animal ver785.yan

Yankee Doodle came to town
Riding on a pony.
Stuck a feather in his cap
And called it macaroni.

Programming for TV art,
Somebody called Tony
Televised a fellow's part
During matrimony.

Although riding into town
Is no longer trendy,
Tony rode, both up and down,
In and out of Wendy.

In a frantic twenty days,
Sparing not their horses,
T. et ux. in divers ways
Practised intercourses -

Up to three times in a day,
In a range of poses.
(Earning money in that way
Is no bed of roses.)

Lights and cameras inside,
Pushed up Wendy's plumbing,
Photographed the spermic tide
Marking Tony's coming.

Integrating in his brain
Man and beast together,
Desmond Morris scores again
Where he sticks his feather.

* * *

The sorry saga of John's peter ver776.oli

O listen to this sorry tale of blighted married life:
Of John and his Lorena, once a loving man and wife.
They copulated nightly, and he regularly came,
But poor Lorena never -had the time to do the same.

One night, in sheer frustration, after John had had his fun,
She finally decided something really must be done.
But, rather than discussion, she chose surgery instead,
So, taking up a kitchen knife to where John lay in bed

And, thinking everyone would see the justice of her case,
She cut his virile member off, an inch above the base.
She took it to her car - a little cylinder of meat –
And drove away to pitch it in the weeds along the street.

They called the local ambulance; they called the state police,
Who scoured the roadsides in attempts to find the missing piece
With help of sniffer dogs and such, they found it pretty soon,
And packed it well with ice-cubes in the early afternoon.
Then, seeing its vitality was not completely gone,
They rushed it to the hospital, and sewed it back on John.

And now, although to sleep with him is something of a bore,
(He hasn't the come-uppance for erecting any more),
His membership has lapsed, but he can safely pee again,
And once more hold his head up high along with other men.

His penis hangs quite normally, just as it did before,
But doesn't rise to serving his libido any more,
While poor Lorena, if she ever feels the urge to come,
Must find some willing paramour, or make do with her thumb.

The moral of this story is, for woman and for man,
Ensure your spouse is satisfied as fully as you can;
And if a problem should arise, in genitals or heart,
The bedroom and the kitchen should be corridors apart.

* * *

Getting it in the Nineties ver771.ina

In autumn, fellows still may feel an urge
To face the ocean billows with a grin;
But long before I'm ready to submerge,
The hardest part, for me, is getting in.

Although it's warmer in the air above,
The water seems to chill my tender skin;
So getting wet's a bit like making love –
The hardest part, for me, is getting in.

* * *

Be prepared! ver673.ial

I always use a condom:
I've done so all my life.
I wear it as a sort of charm.
It keeps my peter safe from harm
And causes no undue alarm
To people like my wife.

I like to use a condom
When otherwise I'm nude.
I slip it on, all nice and tight
(For weddings, I wear pink or white,
And grey or black on Sunday night
According to my mood.)

I like to wear a condom;
I think it suits my style
When I respond to Nature's call
In winter, summer, spring or fall;
And, come what may, in spite of all,
I do it with a smile.

* * *

Small-town Conversation ver737.iha

"I have a pure and honest wife.
Before my Jill and I were wed,
We lived a chaste and proper life
And ne'er together went to bed.

And how was it with you, my friend?"

"I cannot surely say the same,
But on frail memory depend.
Pray tell me, Tom, her maiden name."

* * *

1900 and all that ver780.ben

Ben Franklin couldn't have foreseen
The coloured images on screen
Of youths engaged in copulation,
Transmitted by a cable station;

And Alexander Graham Bell
Assuredly could not foretell
That pre-orgasmic gasps and groans
Would be purveyed by telephones.

But Science, on which all depends,
Serves base as well as noble ends
To gratify mankind's capacity
For uninhibited salacity.

* * *

FROM A LADY FRIEND

Set your doubting mind at rest.
Come by taxi, car or tram.
Let us photograph your chest:
Come and have a mammogram.

A philosopher once guessed
"I can think; therefore, I am."
Think, and set your mind at rest:
Come and have a mammogram.

Come to join the great undressed -
Shorn a moment like a lamb.
Bare your soft, X-rated breast:
Come and have a mammogram.

Topless ladies take the test:
Bare their souls for Uncle Sam.
Semi-naked (bare is best),
Come and have a mammogram.

* * *

Summer camps ver789.wha

What do girls do in the teen-age camps
When the supervisors turn down the lamps?
Taller or stockier, slim or stout –
What do they do when the lights go out?

The maidens from France say "Oui, oui, oui!"
The Italian girls say "Si, si, si!"
While other young chicks say "Cheep, cheep, cheep"
But the English ladies just go to sleep.

Some curl up in their own camp bed
Or in somebody else's cot instead,
For a camp is much cozier than a park
And nobody notices in the dark.

* * *

Plaint ver854.heg

He goes to work, and earns our daily bread.
I stay at home and do the household chores.
But when we seek repose, and go to bed,
My husband snores.

Our love-life, once a matter of the heart,
Is reft by sleeplessness - or solid doors.
If I'm to sleep, we have to sleep apart,
Because he snores.

He doesn't yearn for someone else's wife.
He doesn't sneak away to visit whores.
So what is it that blights our married life?
My husband snores.

What other choices have we, but recourse
To actions good society deplores?
Already separate, we seek divorce
Because he snores.

* * *

Preferences ver805.som

Some girls may like a fellow who goes in for dirty jokes,
While others want a fellow who just sits at home and smokes,
Some girls prefer solicitors or doctors as their friends –
But I just need an intromittent organ.

Some girls may like a boxer, with a pair of flailing fists,
While other go for jockeys on the horses in the lists.
Some girls prefer a homely type who decorates and mends –
But I must have an intromittent organ.

Some girls like jolly fellows, who can sing and even dance,
While others seek the wealthy types,
with pieds-a-terre in France. Some girls are less particular.
I think it all depends -
What I need is an intromittent organ.

* * *

On Call ver754.has

(Lament of an intern's wife)

Hasten where my love lies sleeping
After an exhausting day:
Tell him that his beeper's beeping,
Calling him from far away.

Hasten where my love lies dreaming,
Roused by some far analyst
Or, maybe, some nurseling, scheming
For an extramural tryst.

Hasten where my love lies, resting
Snugly as a bug in rug,
Called by somebody requesting
Solace, sympathy or drug.

Summoned by the near-to-dying,
Hoping, striving to be kind -
Pity the poor doctor, trying
To restore his peace of mind.

In the little hours of morning,
Someone in the world beyond -
With a need, but little warning –
Calls my husband to respond.

Should I rouse my love, my sleeper,
From his slumbering serene,
Or instruct that distant beeper
Where to shove his beep machine?

* * *

Bath towel ver846.whe

When I caress my lady's hips,
Her slender waist, her abdomen,
Her rounded bosom's rosy tips
Grow yet more rosy now and then.

And when I touch her private parts,
The little bits that men forget
(Obsessed by diamonds or hearts)
May still remain a trifle wet

And yet she hangs me up once more
To dry behind the bathroom door.

* * *

Penny's pleas ver634.ful

Full-bellied waves are surging round
The islands in the bay –
So feel me up a little, dear,
Before you go away.

Sweet lakes are shining, mirroring
The sunshine and the rain –
So fondle me a little, dear,
Before you come again.

Full-bosomed hills are far and high;
Blue seas are wide and deep -
So rub in me a little, dear,
Before you fall asleep.

Tall aspen trees are trembling;
Their autumn leaves are brown –
So touch me down a little, dear,
Before you leave for town.

* * *

SHORT VERSES

Form of speech

Venus, in her birthday suit,
Sometimes is acclaimed a "beaut".
Say 'tis beauty, lest catharsis
Strip her virtue from her arsis.

* * *

An uplifting thought

Ann has an alluring bust
And a form fantastic.
When her body turns to dust,
Nothing will be left but rust
And little bits of plastic.

* * *

The market price

The virtuous woman is gold unalloyed:
Her value is far above rubies, they say.
(So I called at the house wherein Ruby's employed
To ask what precisely her price is today.)

* * *

Reproof

Your protestations, Mrs T.,
Of honour and of chastity
Ring hollow, now that I discover
You've been unfaithful to your lover.

* * *

Spring cleaning

The maid, who daily came to dust,
Fell on her knees, and stayed to pray.
O Man, although in God you trust,
You, too, shall come to dust some day.

* * *

.

LIMERICKS

Alternatives

An amorous lady of Spain
Used to seek satisfaction, in vain.
With some of the men
She would try once again,
But she never would try it again.

* * *

The quick and the quittance

Consider the fate of the foetus:
Conceived in a hasty coitus,
And destined to be
A poor mortal, like me,
Until ultimate, lethal quietus.

* * *

Profligacy

Don Juan was a person of means
Who reveled in amorous scenes.
He was known far and wide
For his wealth and his pride
And his widely distributed genes.

* * *

Spots

A dotty Dalmatian named Gwen
Was very suspicious of men.
In a paranoid fit
She leaped into a pit –
And she hasn't been spotted since then.

* * *

The floor walker

Said a highly respectable whore
Whom I met in a multiple store
"It's so hard on the feet
To go walking the street
That I much prefer walking the floor."

* * *

Graffiti

There was a young fellow, Kilroy,
Who once, as a very small boy,
Established his fame
By inscribing his name –
A most unoriginal ploy.

* * *

Chaqu'un a son gout

With downcast eye and manner chaste
You chide me for my lack of taste.
Forgive my human weakness, then,
Since you have tasted other men.

* * *

I know a bank

She stands among the floury meads
Or toils beside the lonely range,
And, countering the dough she kneads,
Converts it into pastry-change.

* * *

A lesson

"O, woe is me!" the maiden cried,
"I am undone, undignified."
Is this disruption you, perhaps,
Or could it be your shoulder-straps?

* * *

Caitlin's lament

Dylan Thomas, poetaster,
Drank, and whored, and met his Master.
Thus are blessings mixed with curses.
Lord, if I could write such verses!

* * *

Super-markets

They keep a cop by the A. & P.
So we stop and shop where the parking's free;
But I think, somehow, that at times like these,
What the town needs now are some Stop & P's.

* * *

Democracy ver82lv.mas

The masses toil (said Marx): it isn't fair,
While wealthy people live a life of e's.
But e (said Einstein) equals emcee square
(And masses now do as they damn well please.)

* * *

For the man who has everything

Already I possess a pen
That writes on butter (now and then).
Won't you invent another, please,
For writing little notes on cheese?

* * *

Sailors breaking wind

The ensign gives a plaintive "peep".
The captain sounds "huzzah!"
While, in his deep and dreamless sleep,
The admiral goes "phhahh!".

* * *

We like sheep, but there's a limit

Every year we have "The Messiah"
Done by our church quoiah,
But now the "Hallelujah" chorus
Tends to borus.

You don't want any more hallelujah,

Dojah?

* * *

The perfect democrat

I don't subscribe to any view
That marks the many from the few.
        To race, religion, sex and rank
My mind is a subscription blank.

* * *

Child care

Bye, baby bunting;
Father's gone a-hunting
        To try to get a camel skin
To wrap his baby bunting in
And stop that goddam awful din.

* * *

Toilet roll

Involved in life's long riddle,
Our daily tasks we tend,
And when we reach the middle,
We know we're at the end.

* * *

The Mayagüez incident
Washington has claimed success: all our men are back.
(Some in glory; some in pain; some in plastic sack.)
Some are somewhat richer now, though most are still in rags.
And all the World has wasted living souls - and plastic bags,

* * *

Discretion

My correspondence files hold few
Exchanges worth referring to.
The letters signed "With lots of love"
I don't keep carbon copies of.

* * *

Phage is the rage

"Never did so much theory
Depend upon so few.
We need a fresh approach" he said
(He works on T-2, too.)

* * *

Rural economics

Old Adam daily tills the soil
And sells the harvest of his toil;
But when, at eve, he drinks his fill,
His filthy lucre soils the till.

* * *

Sci-fi

Our natural addiction
For stories that distract
Has boomed in science fiction.
Let's stick to science fact.

* * *

Deception

O, what a tangled web we weave
When first we practise to deceive.
But let us not despair. The fact is,
That we may all improve with practice.

* * *

Financial note

"Rejoice!" he said. "Without a doubt
The slump's begun to bottom out."
I'll start rejoicing if and when
The market bottoms in again.

* * *

Planning

Rock-a-bye baby on the tree top.
When the wind blows the cradle will rock.
When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall.
Down will come baby, heavily insured.

* * *

Christmas note

The renting of a room pro tern
Has often proved elusive.
The best hotel in Bethlehem
Was probably exclusive.

* * *

Lines written on 21 June

This is the solstice, this the longest day.
The sun returns - but you are still away.
My loneliness is longer in the light,
But this, thank God, will be the shortest night.

* * *

Unholy nights

'Tis the week before Christmas, and all through the town
Those maddening carols have gotten me down.
So bring me a couple of aspirins, quick,
Just one more Noel, and I'm going to be sick.

* * *

Excuse

What makes a scientist stay at his bench
    Evenings and weekends through much of his life?
A thirsting for knowledge that nothing can quench,
    And somewhere to get him away from his wife.

* * *

Bons mots

Who wrote "When cherry trees are true,
    We may not stoop to lie"?
Let credit fall where credit's due -
    My masters - it was I.

* * *

Teleology

Within my nostrils there's a tuft of hair
To filter dust (they tell me) from the air,
    This seems to me unlikely to be true,
Since I have hair around my anus, too.

* * *

If you ples

With waitresses you're quite correct.
You manage businesses with ease.
Your weaknesses we all respect:
But why on earth say process-es?

* * *

Ladies first

A fellow ought to learn at school
That "Ladies first" should be the rule.
Use courtesy instead of force
Through doorways and in intercourse.

* * *

La krokodilo

En romkatolika sinodo
Au' japandevena pagodo,
La ccefpredikisto
(Ne Esperantisto)
Sin vestas per silka krokodo.

Tajloro admonas la filon
"Rigardu atente la stilon.
Ne sekvu la modem:
Surmetu krokodon.
Sed uzu ne plu krokodilon."

* * *

Fungi imperfecti

Quisnam sum, qui nomino
Pulchros et delectos,
(Aevo in atomico)
"Fungos imperfectos".

* * *

Liriodendron

The tulips on a tulip tree
Are “tulips” but in name.
Though “tulips” superficially,
They merely look the same.

* * *

Laburnum

Who stands by a laburnum tree
And waits for golden rain,
Expecting floral alchemy,
Will stand and wait in vain.

* * *

Eden

We sampled from the knowledge tree
The apples that it bore -
But still mankind appears to be
No wiser than before.

* * *

GLOSSES

glo323.ili. Tegenaria is the common house spider. (This verse was included in my first compilation, published in 1978", but was omitted from the expanded collection published in 1987.)

glo625.inb. Certain tropical species of ants create hanging gardens out of epiphytic plants, and make their nests inside them.

glo647.inr. I was a presidential spouse, like Nancy Reagan and Raisa Gorbachev, at a dinner of the Western Society of Naturalists, in Monterey, California, when Lanna Cheng gave the retiring president's address. (December 1985)

glo652.wec. Published in a box in the Spring Books section of Nature (320, 642; 1986).

glo654.heo. Written for a friend who studies underground insects called mole crickets.

glo657.ias. Nuclear research is, or was, carried out in the city of Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan.

glo664.let. A parody of "Get me to the church on time", Doolittle's song from the musical comedy "My fair lady". It relates to Jewish New Year festivities on the La Jolla beach, where members of the assembled congregation throw bread into the waves to symbolize their casting out of past evils (or something of that sort).

glo667.wes. For many years, Dr David Montgomery was a dominant and charismatic Secretary of the Western Society of Naturalists. His retirement in 1990 was deeply felt by the membership.

glo669.pro I don't know whether sulphur hypo-iodite exists, in outer space or anywhere else. It abbreviates to SIO, which is where I work.

glo670.cor. I think all that needs explaining is the use of the words Tuileries and Tegelbakken, places in Paris and Stockholm where tiles were made.

glo671.why. Our bathroom soap has a disc of iron in it, whereby it can be hung to drain on a magnetic bracket, while soap operas are domestic dramas shown on commercial television programmes advertising - well, among other things, soap.

glo672.gam. This is a Tennyson parody, deploring the rains that in 1987 washed out a lot of the international tennis tournaments at Wimbledon. (That this town was so named because it was sited at the confluence of the River Wimble and the River Don is my own fancy.)

glo673.ial. The bit about colour variants is purely fanciful.

glo674.api. A pigeon really did get into St Andrew’s Church, Headington, Oxfordshire. (I forget whether it died there or not.)

glo675.aga. The title is a loose Latin translation of "Meadow Larkins", which is the name of our house in Headington.

glo675.aco. A variant of the preceding verse. (I liked both.)

glo677.the. Poor England is making a little money by accepting, for a consideration, rubbish that other countries want to get rid of.

glo678.ons. Hawaii used to be called the Sandwich Isles. Vahines is a Hawaiian word for young ladies.

glo679.non. If this poem has any meaning, I didn't put it there. It just grew.

glo682.pen. Male emperor penguins incubate their egg on their feet, a far from enviable task

glo683.itw. This is a well-known fairy story - well known, except perhaps for the ending.
This was published in "Zoonooz" (62(10)3, 1989). A reader pointed out in the next issue that in fact warthog flesh is good to eat after all. For the sake of the hogs, I hope this does not become general knowledge.

glo687.tox. The seaways between Sweden and Denmark have been recently plagued by "red tides" of poisonous algae.

glo688.set. Women are encouraged to have periodic X-rays of their v breasts, in efforts to detect cancers early.

glo692.inf. Red poppies grew in the fields of battle in France and Belgium in WW-I. Opium poppies, mauve and white, are extensively if clandestinely grown in Southeast Asia.

glo693.aro. The mythical giant kangaroo was given this name by Australian aborigines.

glo694.whe. (Everyone in molecular biology labs runs gels these days.). Tune: a German Christmas song, “Die lustige Rittenfahrt”, better known to Americans as “Jingle Bells”.

glo695.ika. It is regrettable that American banks should have chosen this acronym - long used for the Irish Revolutionary Army - to describe some kind of tax-deferred account. (I think the first line is from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream".)

glo696.ify. We made more than half a dozen expeditions to Palau, in the Western Caroline Islands. I like visiting islands of the Pacific.

glo697.que. Many Aztec words end in -tl.

glo698.myw. On 1 November 1952 the island of Elugelap (or Eluklab) - part of the Enewetak Atoll - was blown to smithereens by an American thermonuclear test called Mike.

glo699.yau. A mass protest by Chinese university students and 'y others clamouring for reform in Tien An Men Square, Beijing, was successfully suppressed by the military. Hundreds of citizens were killed or wounded, and the consequent world-wide revulsion cost China dearly.

glo700.spi. When oil was spilled in Alaska from the wrecked Exxon tanker "Valdez", wildlife suffered of course, but a lot of lawyers and landladies managed to turn the disaster to their financial benefit.

glo703.awa. Crickets are insects, bats are mammals, cricket-bats are pieces of wood employed in a sport when the weather permits.

glo705.for. A devastating fire at Bar Harbor, in Maine, destroyed a large part of a valuable collection of various races of mice used for genetic analyses. Some of the mutants have strange names.

glo706.sta. Daniel Quayle, while vice-president of the U.S.A., was photographed holding a gun the wrong way round.

glo708.ass. The year expressed in Roman numerals.

glo709.dum. Commemorates, in Esperanto, the 50-th anniversary of the teaching activities of Professor Chou Io, a Chinese entomologist.

glo710.the. Baluts are fertilized eggs that have been incubated long enough to contain a well-formed chick or duck embryo. Boiled, they are regarded as a delicacy in the Philippines.

glo711.inr. This summarizes the cycle of nature through fire, V clouds, water and earth, and back again.

glo712.our. Some recently discovered asteroids have been given names to commemorate popular musicians, notably the Beatles. (J.B.S. Haldane once said that God must have been particularly fond of beetles, because he had created so many species.)

glo713.oil. Some botanists study so-called lower plants, not generally regarded as among the most glamorous.

glo714.blu. Whereas older textbooks classify cyanophytes as blue-green algae, many modern microbiologists prefer to regard them as bacteria because they lack nuclei.

glo715.ono. In some American states, notably California, one can choose for ones car registration plates any combination of letters and numbers, so long as it is short, unique, and respectable.

glo716.tur. I hate to see living turtles kept in tanks in some Oriental restaurants (e.g., in Singapore) where a customer may select one to be cooked for his dinner.

glo717.ima. Many employees in the transport systems in England are of Pakistani descent.

glo719.sav. Much of our World is being spoiled by deforestation, pollution and other ecological ills.

glo720.mym. Many Christmas carols commemorate the birth of Christ in the third person. This one adopts a more personal approach.

glo721.weu. University professors on retirement are sometimes proffered a "golden handshake", with ambiguous objectives.

glo722.thi. A polished black marble wall in Washington, D.C., is a memorial to Americans killed in the Vietnam war.

glo723.whe. At "commencement exercises" in a university, when degrees are awarded, faculty members generally convene in their academic robes.

glo724.ona. To the tune of "Tit Willow", from "The Mikado" by Gilbert and Sullivan, these verses celebrate the joys of possessing a personal computer.

glo725.for. To the tune of "I am a pirate king", from "The Pirates of Penzance" by Gilbert and Sullivan, these words explain my feelings about oceanographic research on board a ship.

glo726.wit. To the tune of General Stanley's song, "Sighing softly to the river", in "The Pirates of Penzance" by Gilbert and Sullivan, I deplore atmospheric pollution.

glo728.pri. Of all the known priors of St. Peter’s priory church at Dunstable, in Bedfordshire, these are the ones recorded before 1500 A.D.

glo729.poo. Millie was an elderly dog who shared the White House with a President of the United States of America. Tune: "Nine green bottles".

glo730.emp. A company in New York specialises in kosher poultry, butchered strictly according to the Jewish law.

glo731.blo. A free translation of a poem by Mei Yao-Chen, an 11th Century Chinese poet, commemorating a technological development that in a way foreshadowed the

Industrial Revolution.

glo732.the. Something about cosmic music of the spheres.

glo733.the. There really are mice living in the London Underground railway system.

glo734.sta. The Dutch elm disease wiped out virtually all elm trees in England, thereby changing the aspect of the landscape.

glo735.hel. A loose translation of a poem by the Greek poet Empediocles (6th Century B.C.)

glo737.iha. A joke.

glo738.bew. The large brown seaweed, *Laminariaf*, is harvested on the coasts of Brittany by means of a mechanical device called a scoubidou. (I don't know the derivation of this word.)

glo739.bef. A major branch of the plum tree in our garden, in Headington, Oxfordshire, came down in a rainstorm.

glo742.sta. A sort of Christmas carol, composed during the war in the Middle East.

glo743.war. Martin Luther pinned his 95 (why 95?) protestant statements to the church door at Wittenberg.

glo744.ogi. A parody of "Home on the range", deploring the urbanization of Los Angeles.

glo745.apo. Penned shortly after returning from a tour of Belize.

glo746.asb. A pseudo-middle-English parody of "Le mort d'Arthur", in which the English kings Arthur and Alfred are confused (as in "1066 and all that" by W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman, 1931.)

glo747.pra. The females of some species of praying mantis eat their mates during copulation. (Verse published in the entomological newsletter "Antenna".)

glo748.the. Bonen and Doolittle were among the first to indicate (in P.N.A.S. 72, 2310, 1975) that the plastids of red algae may have evolved from ancestral blue-green algae.

glo751.par. On the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II.

glo752.noo. Do we need to use euphemisms for age and death?

glo753.doy. Toxic wastes from industrial countries like the U.S.A. are sent abroad for disposal in poorer countries, who are paid to accept them.

glo754.has. Plaint by a doctor's wife about the disruption of v life when her husband is "on call". (A correspondent with the initials B.W.E. composed a tune for it.)

glo758.ron. Oliver North, without approval by the U.S. Senate but purportedly under advisement from President Reagan, misapplied federal funds to support military action in Iran.

glo759.moo. Since the Pope finally exculpated Galileo, who had propounded the heretical view that the Earth goes round the Sun, it seems about time for even conservative Roman Catholic doctrine to condone contraception.

glo760.car. A *souk* is a market-place in an Egyptian city, busy in the daytime and evening but strangely quiet in the early morning. I visited the one at Aswan between 5.30 and 6.30 a.m. on 5 Apr 93.

glo761.moo. An unrhymed verbal picture of life at Beni Hassan between 5.30 and 6.30 a.m. on 9 Apr 93.

glo763.now. I had to spend a lot of time at the Shiley Eye Clinic v while my pupils were being dilated by some yellow dye mixture.

glo764.coc. Amnesic shellfish poisoning sometimes causes loss of memory in those who have eaten toxic clams. (Presumably the animals themselves don't have memories to lose!)

glo765.pom. A papyrus (#1966 recto, now in the ancient Egyptian library in Turin, Italy) is hard to interpret, but I have assumed that it might bear the words of a song about a party thrown by a wealthy country gentleman in the New Kingdom around 1175 B.C..

glo766.myf. "Significant other" is a term that I have encountered only recently in administrative documents.

glo768.ile. I myself really don't pinch hotel towels.

glo769.1on. Enough DNA could be extracted from a fossil weevil preserved in amber, to provide information on its phylogeny (This verse was published in "Antenna" 18:4, 1994).

glo770.mym. *Tot aves quot mores.*

glo772.our. Biological experiments carried out in space on a "Challenger" expedition involved astronauts, rats and jellyfish.

glo773.iha. At Oxford University there was a competition for poems on this topic by graduates of the university. This submission was adjudged ineligible for consideration

because I had graduated from the wrong place, Cambridge.

glo775.itc. We watched a lunar eclipse from the beach.

glo776.oli. Whoever failed to read all about the Bobbits and their marital discord, as reported *in extenso* in the American press, have been spared a lot of mawkish "news". For the others, no explanation of this verse is necessary.

glo777.ins. *Coprinus comatusi* (An edible fungus in the Besidiomycetacese)

glo778.ais. Most infants in tropical countries learn their alphabets from books created in Europe, although many of the items mentioned are unfamiliar to them. This is an attempt to remedy the situation.

glo779.iwe. Does anyone make men's underpants with a left-handed opening?

glo780.ben. In the USA one can dial certain telephone numbers and, for a fee, hear words and sounds classified as pornographic.

glo781.now. This commemorates the change, in the Chinese calendar, from the Year of the Cock to the Year of the Dog (1994).

glo783.wee. At the end of an expedition on the Japanese research vessel "Sohgen-maru" we had a party. When it came to my turn at the microphone, I sang this parody of an old English music-hall ballad, "Under the lilac".

glo785.yan. Desmond Morris created for the British television a programme describing, among other details, human intercourse as seen from the inside. The principal actors were Tony and Wendy Duffield, who told in a short published article how much effort was involved in getting things just right.

glo786.fro. Water is the main fluid that keeps life going on Earth.

glo788.pro. Dr. Ted Case and his students study genetic variation among lizards on offshore islands in Baja California. “Skinkle” is a carollian portmanteau word: "simple + kinky".

glo790.upg. On a recent flight to Europe we were upgraded from tourist to business class, and enjoyed unaccustomed luxuries.

glo791.sun. There are parallels between the roan who calls faithful Muslims to prayer from a minaret and the cock bird who sings from a high branch to proclaim his territory.

glo793.rip. Transient natural rhythms have different periodicities, from seconds to years

glo794.far. Lines penned before abdominal surgery.

glo795.jos. Jose was the name I gave to the metal stand bearing bags of solutions for the intravenous drip system that fed me for a week in hospital. We strolled around the wards together.

glo796.hap. Lines penned after abdominal surgery.

glo797.lan. Tune: "Land of hope and glory".

glo798.ify. Tune (popular in England during WW-II): "Doing the "Lambeth walk".

glo801.hai. I once misheard "The Creatures of Prometheus" , which set me thinking about Greece.

glo804.tho. A Gilbertian addition to a Gilbert & Sullivan song from "Iolanthe".

glo805.som. Inspired by a comment in a womens' magazine.

glo806.alo. Our discovery of how *Lipochaeta* feeds on microscopic diatoms, etc., was reported in "Nature" (250, 167-8, 1974) and even illustrated on the issue cover.

glo807.myk. Too many people type um without realising that the second letter should be a Greek μ. This note appeared in the correspondence columns of "Nature".

glo808.fro. Avons and Wellands are kinds of small boats that we used to travel between the "Sohgen Maru" and island shores in Palau. They had to be lifted aboard every night.

glo809.eas. There are several time zones across the U.S.A.

glo811.eac. Lines penned while attending a degree-conferring ceremony at the University of Waterloo, in Ontario. They were published a year later in the college newspaper.

glo812.iye. I wish I knew why in the U.S.A. one can no longer buy jars of pickles containing real dill.

glo813.hol. A sort of cereal with botanical notes.

glo815.the. Odd pronunciations.

glo817.pri. A cycling of the seasons, which can start anywhere; at the end, go back to the beginning again.

glo818.yea. An additional verse for one of the better-known music-hall songs of around 1900.

glo819.alo. See Cheng, L. & Lewin, R.A. 1974. Nature 250, 167-168

glo820.thi. In the Chinese New Year calendar, 1996-7 was the Year of the Rat.

glo821.mas. "Mass" has different meanings in different contexts.

glo822.upo. In Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland", the caterpillar told Alice about special properties of the fungus on which he is sitting.

glo823.all. The first rules of Esperanto grammar, set to the tune of the carol "Good Christian men, rejoice".

glo824.sho. In Nature (380, 137-139), N. Biver et al. reported that they could detect huge quantities of carbon monoxide emitted from the comet Hale-Bopp.

glo829.ves. A loose translation of a 19th century Italian poem, "La Vespa Teresa" by Luigi Sailer, with a bit added on the end.

glo830.mee. We don't talk about Deutschland, Suomi or Magyaroszag, so why do the Burmese want us to re-name Burma?

glo831.lea. Lines penned on a trans-continental flight.

glo833.spo. Neaves, W.B. et al. (1980) J. Reprod. Fert. 59, 509-513.

glo834.wat. Composed during a symposium on aquatic insects, held in Florence (1996).

glo837.one. We really did have a 6-gonad jellyfish in the aquarium at SIO. (Most jellyfish have only 4.)

glo839.tho. Kelly, D.A. 1997. J. Morphol. 233: 249-255.

glo840.thi A parody of Arac's song from the opera "Princess Ida" by W.S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan.

glo844.gen. Dedication at the front of my doctoral thesis, on the mating behaviour of the alga *Chlamydomonas*, submitted to Yale University in May 1950. My examiners were Drs. David M. Bonner, Lewis J. Stadler, Seymour H. Hutner and Paul R. Burkholder. I passed.

glo849.ame. Recent data indicate that there is or was water on Mars.

glo852.aro. Actually, the Mosaic code has no relationship to either tobacco mosaic disease or proscriptions by Moses.

glo855.ili. Singapore Airlines puts out (or up) "The Silver Kris".

glo858.his. From "The New Hymnal, Revised". Tune: St. Anne 7.6.7.6.7.6. William Croft, 1789.

glo859.pro. Prochloron is a single-celled alga that lives in a tropical ascidian in coral reef areas.

glo860.thr. A sort of choral carol for Boxing Day (26 December).

glo861bes. Maternal care of eggs and young by crocodiles has recently been well documented. They aren't all that beastly.

glo862.dow. For the last few years nobody has found any specimen of the beautiful golden toad (Bufo periglenes) in the Costa Rican rainforest. It is now presumed to be extinct: no-one knows why.

glo866.peo. This story about M.M. had prevailed in the south of France since well before the publication of “The da Vinci Code” by Dan Brown in 2003.

glo900.the. Feral camels, placentals, and kangaroos, marsupials, may occupy similar areas in Australia, but they don't really hybridize.

glo904.the. A city in northern Greece.

glo909.why. Many airport waiting-rooms have special sections where one can change a baby's diapers.

glo913.weh. The international Red List lists rare animals and plants in danger of extinction

glo917.int. See Wilde, S.A, Valley, J.W., Peck, W.H. and Graham, C.M. 2001. Nature 409, 175-178.

glo922.apo. After William Wordsworth

glo925.ism. A formal academic ceremony where Oxford University confers higher degrees

glo928.the. Methane is one of the main gases produced by intestinal fermentation.

glo953.som. After Hillaire Belloc

glo956.weh. The Royal Shakespeare (theatrical) Company.

glo957.jus. Pancratium maritimum is a white bulb-forming flower on some

Mediterranean shores

glo962.asc. Large patches of manganese oxide nodules occur in some places on the sea floor.

glo967.ini. See Rindi, F. & Guiry, M.D. 2002. Phycologia 41, 421-431

glo1031. GM is usually taken to mean genetically modified by some modern techniques additional to the breeders' classical methods involving genetic selection and hybridization.

Some tricks of the trade 2 x 07

Real English poetry seems to have almost died out within the past century. We had many good poets in the past: Pope, Dryden, Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, et al., and of course Shakespeare. In the past century or so there were still good writers of light verse, notably Chesterton in England and later, in America, Dorothy Parker and Phyllis McGinley. And, of course, there was the redoubtable Englishman W.S. Gilbert, whose name would have been enshrined in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey if the local dean, evidently a person with little appreciation for humour, hadn't strongly objected. But now, it seems, anything goes. A teacher of English, say, decides that he need not observe any of the customary rules of rhyme and rhythm, or even normal syntax, if he can persuade a friendly editor to induce a compliant type-setter

to set the stuff
in short lines like this.

They probably consider that the general public is too ignorant to know the difference between poetry and prose, and couldn't care anyway. For examples, see any recent issues of, say, *The New Yorker*.

Incidentally, for light verse one usually expects an amusing twist at the end, as in modern limericks. But not in the old ones. In Edward Lear's limericks the last line is usually just a variant of the first . (*There was an old man of Dundee … That silly old man of Dundee*.) In this respect, at least, I think we have progressed.

Since it seems now to be past time for a renaissance of English light verse, I submit here a few tricks which in the past have stood poets in good stead, and which you might consider using if and when you begin writing real poetry. But use them sparingly. As a general rule, the less you deviate from normal vocabulary, syntax and word order, the better.

1. There are many English synonyms with different stresses, so you can choose, for instance, between *start* and *begin*, or can use *shade* instead of *shadow*.

2. There's always the universal *O* to add when you need an unstressed syllable. *(O say can you see … I have a song to sing O.)*

3. In English, as in French, some elisions are permissible (e.g., *Here's* a pretty mess).

4. You can often add an extra sound by putting an *a* on a word (e.g., *A-hunting* we will go) or inserting the word *to* in front of a verb even when it isn't really necessary. You can even insert a nonsense syllable such as *sir* or *ah*. Moreover, in English there are lots of single or two-word modifiers and spacers (such as *very, perhaps*, *maybe, alas, I suppose, of course*, etc.) that you can push in if you want to elongate a line.

5 In songs, where rhythm is important, one can often change the usual word order (e.g., A *bias to disclose would be indelicate* … instead of the normal *It would be indelicate to disclose a bias*.) More usually, one can just reverse normal word order. For some

questions in English this is acceptable isn't it? - but in other contexts it's unusual (e.g., O foolish fay, *think you* because …)

6. In songs, two or more syllables can be sung on a single note (e.g., His sisters *and-his* cousins and his aunts. I *generally* go below …)

NOTE: In English, most syllables embody a vowel, but not all. For instance, *little* and *prism* are bi-syllabic since some liquid consonants like *l* and *m* can act as vowels.

7., Particularly in hymns, generally composed by clergymen most of whom had a classical training, one often finds verbs moved to the end of a sentence as in Latin (e.g., Julius Caesar's *Homines ,id quod volunt, credunt* loosely translated as *People believe whatever they want to.)*

8. You can often find a named location with the sort of rhythm you need. (E.g., In *Islington* there was a man …. could have been *Birmingham* or *Basingstoke*, but not *Leeds* or *London*. (Incidentally, in this poem Goldsmith rhymed *foes* with *clothes*, which I wouldn't have considered acceptable until I learned that in olden days the latter word was often pronounced *close*. You can sometimes deduce how words used to be pronounced by comparing line-end rhymes, as in Pilkington's Elizabethan madrigal *Rest sweet nymphs,* where you find *eies/sympathies*, *groves/loves* and *gone/mone.)*

9. Robbie Burns sometimes resorted to a Scottish word when it suited him. You wouldn't think of rhyming *two* with *away*, but Burns managed this by writing or singing Bonnie Charlie's gang *awa*… Many a heart shall break in *twa*. (Most of the rest of the verses are in more normal Sassenach English.)

10. Gilbert, to suit Sullivan's tunes, sometimes shifted a stress illegitimately (e.g., I took her *for* a proprieto*r* in a ladies' semin*ary*), but I wouldn't recommend that sort of device for anyone but an aspiring Gilbertian. Nor would I recommend using a nominative instead of an accusative form (e.g., He thought so little they rewarded *he*) to wangle a rhyme. And I know of almost nobody but Gilbert who recently had the temerity to stress a final *-y* and rhyme it with *die* (e.g., Single I must *die*. I shall have to be contented with their heartfelt sympath*y*) although as recently as in the 19th Century Wordsworth sometimes did this (e.g., Dull would he be of soul who could pass *by* a sight so touching in its majest*y*.)

Nevertheless, Gilbert was pretty consistent at using archaic forms such as *thou* and *thine* instead of our more usual *you* and *yours*, and adjusting the verbs accordingly.
Go thou and do likewise!